

The background of the cover is a photograph of the Khalsa College building in Amritsar, India. The building is a grand, multi-story structure made of light-colored brick with intricate architectural details, including multiple domes and arched windows. A prominent clock tower is visible in the center. In the foreground, several people are seen from behind, including a man in a blue turban and white shirt, and a woman in a green and blue sari. The sky is clear and blue.

# NISHAAN

TV / 2007

NAGAARA

**The Khalsa College:  
Legacy of Bhai Ram Singh**

**The Singh Sabha Movement  
Sikhs in California**

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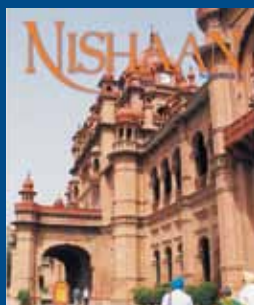
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# Editorial

## The imperatives of education

It has been said that “Education is that which stays with you after you have forgotten your text books”. Most text books provide information, but information has a very short half-life. There are two other components of education that transcend information and cannot be regained from any source books. These are skills and character. If our educational institutions do not provide for these, they certainly miss the imperatives of education.

Even of these two, it is character that deserves precedence. Here is what Albert Einstein, the great mind of modern times, observed in this context: “It is essential that the student acquires an understanding of and a lively feeling for values. He must acquire a vivid sense of the beautiful and of the morally good. Otherwise he—with his specialised knowledge – more closely resembles a well-trained dog than a harmoniously developed person.”

Whenever nations pass through historical vicissitudes they are impelled to reconsider their educational programmes for the youth to accelerate regenerative processes. After genocide at the hands of Nazis in Germany, the Jewish community held a conference in Europe to consider what they needed to restore their dignity and enhance their effectiveness in the dynamics of the post-World War II international community. Among the resolutions passed were two outstanding ones that related to education. They resolved that they shall educate their children to such an extent that they would excel all others with ease; and, two, they would do their best to pass on their culture to their children and future generations.

Vicissitudes of varying degrees of seriousness have beset even the Sikh peoples. Following defeat of the Sikh forces in the decisive Second Anglo-Sikh War of 1849 and consequent annexation of the Punjab to British India, a state of profound dejection prevailed among the Sikhs. From rulers, they had been reduced to serfs. So abject was their disappointment that some hundred thousands of them left the fold. Christian missionaries considered this demoralised community with proselytising designs.

Then came about a renaissance but Sikh leadership was divided into two disparate groups, the Lahore Khalsa Diwan and the Amritsar Khalsa Diwan – the former a conformist group and the latter a reformist one. However, both were very concerned on the impending challenges that the community faced and felt that arrangements to impart modern education to their youth must be their foremost concern. It was the Lahore Khalsa

Diwan that, in 1892, established a Khalsa College, and that too in Amritsar. Both the Khalsa Diwans thereafter coalesced into the Khalsa Diwan. This latter organisation undertook the task of looking after the secular as well as religious education of Sikh youth and organised the Sikh Educational Conference that has since held its conventions annually and expanded programmes of educational activities.

New colleges and schools came into being. Eminent leaders included Sir Sunder Singh Majithia, Bhai Vir Singh, S.Trilochan Singh, S.Arjan Singh Bagrian, S.Harbans Singh Attari and Bhai Jodh Singh. They were men of great vision and commitment and were able to inspire and enthuse such stalwarts and devoted educationists as Prof Teja Singh, Bawa Harkishan Singh, Principal Narinjan Singh, Principal Gurbachan Singh Talib, Prof. Ganda Singh, Prof Harbans Singh and many others who rendered unforgettable service in raising the image of Sikh educational institutions and upgrading therein instruction in divinity and moral sciences.

At the time of viscous persecution by the Mughal rulers, holy shrines of the Sikhs had come to be looked after by non-Sikh mahants who soon enough turned these into veritable family properties. At great sacrifice of lives, the Gurdwara Reform Movement in 1925 was able to wrest Sikh shrines back from the clutches of such usurper mahants. Through a Legislative Act, as a consequence, the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) came into being and started to receive sizeable funds in the form of offerings and donations by visiting pilgrims. A quantum of these funds were utilised for establishing educational institutions not only in the Punjab, but places as distant as Bombay. Due emphasis was given to religious and moral instruction.

The community suffered another devastating vicissitude in 1947 when the division of India (essentially, Punjab) took place. Nearly half of the Sikh community had to leave their homes and hearths and suffered tremendous hardships and loss of life while emigrating from Western Punjab to the Eastern. They not only left behind their important historical shrines but also scores of educational institutions in Montgomery, Lyallpur, Gujranwala, Rawalpindi, Jhelum and other places. Most of these had then to be re-established in Eastern Punjab.

Based on the SGPC model, the Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (DSGPC) came to be established

half a century later which also embarked upon setting up of several educational institutions in the national capital.

As a result of such community endeavours, hundreds of schools and scores of colleges came to be established by the organisations mentioned earlier. Some private organisations and public trusts also set up several educational institutions. By any account, this was a highly commendable effort by the community.

During partition of the country, the Sikhs had opted to be with India (rather than Pakistan) on the basis of solemn assurances by leaders like Gandhi and Nehru that the Sikhs would get a special place in free India where their national aspirations could find satisfaction. However, after partition, these leaders immediately went back on their assurances saying that "times have changed now". Sardar Kapur Singh in his important speech at the Lok Sabha titled *Betrayal of the Sikhs*, dwelt on this improbity in detail. The Sikhs were naturally bitter at such betrayal.

After nearly half a century of gradual decline of Akali hegemony in the Punjab, came the unfortunate Bhindranwale saga. During that period, thousands of young Sikhs were immolated, thousands put into jail and hundreds still continue to linger there. Besides many tens of thousands became alienated from their educational pursuits. The illusory hopes that Bhindranwale seemed to have generated slipped into pensive gloom soon enough.

Sikhs had been pushed into a dismal situation. Thousands fell into the trap of addictive substances. Many rural youth seem to have given up productive pursuits and employed alien labour to even till their lands. These alien wage-earners are gradually becoming land owners of the Punjab, and the bereft owners are fast losing their traditional values. Of the some 10 million peasants of the Punjab, nearly 500,000 have already sold off their lands. Suicides among the peasants is rife. Unfortunately, concern about their plight is not on the agenda of any politician, non even of the two principal Gurdwara organisations, the SGPC and the DSGPC.

At the same time, standards of Sikh teaching institutions, by and large, have gone down considerably. At one time quite a number of schools and colleges run by the community could well have been proud of their results. Gradually, gloom seems to have descended on virtually all of them. Some months ago the magazine 'India Today' made a comparative study of schools in Delhi. None of the schools managed by DSGPC could find a place among the top ten. Recently, the list of 125 selected 'Nasa Stars' included just one Sikh candidate and that too from a DPS. Many Sikh-run schools are reported to be overstaffed, but unfortunately have produced questionable results. In the All-India civil services competitive exams, the name of a Sikh candidate is hard to find.

Not that long back, the Punjabi language was ranked as 13th amongst the world's leading languages according to UNESCO. The same organisation has recently predicted that this language will become extinct over the next five decades.

An examination was recently organised by the NCERT sometime ago for primary school students in the Punjab. About 45% students failed in all of the subjects! Results in the Punjabi language were even more dismal. According to a survey by the Punjab School Education Board, 81% of students in primary schools could not even score 33% marks. According to teachers of the sixth class, half the students from primary schools did not know how even to recognise the Punjabi alphabet! Literacy rate ranking of Punjab among the states of India has plummeted down from 7th to 17th. Vietnam with an average per capita income of \$290 per annum has a literacy rate of 94%. By contrast, the Punjab with an average per capita income of \$500 per annum, has a literacy rate of just 56%.

What is happening to education in the Punjab, and what is happening to its youth? Parents do not seem to be that much perturbed. Anywhere else, they would have moved heaven and earth to improve the situation, so that their children get the best of education.

Why can't we persuade our NRI relatives to adopt educational arrangements in their villages? Why can't we enthruse our industrialists to lend some of their resources for higher education of our children? Why cannot we forge a Central Sikh Education Board to provide overall supervision and assistance to our schools? Why cannot we insist that only educationists be members of the Governing Bodies of our schools and colleges and replace the illiterate or quasi-literate individuals presently occupying such key positions.

I am reminded of a true story where the chairman of the Governing Body of a Khalsa School in Delhi wanted to get his grandchild admitted to a convent school. The principal of that school asked, "You have your own school, why don't you admit your grandson there?" The chairman said, "our school does not have good standards." The principal retorted, "you are the chairman of that school; whom do you think is responsible for such poor standards? Why don't you work to raise its standards?"

Is there a silver lining somewhere? I believe there is but we have to honestly recognise this critical problem and then work towards achieving the highest standards of excellence in educating our youth for the imperatives of tomorrow.

# Message of Guru Nanak : live in Peace and Harmony

All prophets of mankind have given the world the message of love. The main message of Guru Nanak, founding Prophet of the Sikh faith, is respect for all religions and freedom to practice one's faith. For him, love and respect and not just tolerance for those of other faiths is the cornerstone of a democratic society. Guru Nanak's whole life and teaching symbolised inter-faith harmony. He fervently, preached worship of One God and love of all people as the spirit of God pervaded equally in all human beings.

Perhaps no other religion truly accepts other faiths as does Sikhism. Guru Nanak's mission, vision, values and spiritual philosophy was to change the people's minds because they had had years of consistent exposure to hatred and mistrust, bias and prejudice on grounds of religion. He was appalled by communal strife, disharmony and ruthless persecution and oppression witnessed in the wake of Moghul Babar's invasion of the country. He wanted the people to get to live by a relationship built on trust whatever their religious beliefs. He wanted them to live happily in love, peace and harmony respecting each other's faith.

People flocked to hear his rational and pragmatic sermons and decided not to let go his message of amity and goodwill but to act on it. They were moved deeply. Thus, Guru Nanak forged a bond of love and respect among all people of diverse faiths. He had been successful in getting people to change their minds because he was motivated by his deep mystical communion with God. His telling observation was *Na Koi Hindu, Na Mussalman* (There is no Hindu, nor Mussalman). They are all human beings created by God and despite their distinctive religions and beliefs, equal before the Creator, who equally abides in everyone.

*Sabna Jian Ka Ek Data* (God is the Father of all creation and of all mankind) "We are all His children and equal before Him. One, who realises this, is the true man of religion", he preached. When asked who is greater of the two, Hindu or Muslim, Guru Nanak replied, "without good deeds both will come to grief". "Loving God, His creation and doing good deeds is the true religion", he repeatedly emphasised. "Respect for each other is high but higher still is respect for each other's views", he stated.

A revolutionary spiritual reformer, Guru Nanak did not believe in a rigid caste system, idol worship, ritualism and asceticism. According to him, no person is high or low because of birth, gender, caste,

religion or race. All human beings are one and the same. It was deeds not birth that determined one's merit. Guru Nanak had pride in associating himself with the humble and downtrodden. He steered clear of superstitions and prejudices.

He sought to demolish caste by initiating the custom of *Guru Ka Langar*, the free community kitchen, where all men and women, rich or poor, high caste or low or of whatever religious belief, sat together to eat as equals, a tradition carried forward to this day. At gurdwaras, the visitor of whatever faith is welcome. He receives both blessings and hospitality.

The three basic tenets of Guru Nanak's teaching are *Kirat Karna, Vand Chhakna, Nam Japna*, i.e. to earn one's living by honest labour, to share one's earnings with others and constant meditation (*Nam Simran*, contemplation on God's Name). "I have no miracles except the Name of God", he said. Another basic concept of his teaching is *sewa* or voluntary service of humanity.

Guru Nanak firmly believed in full acceptance of life as a pious householder, with its truly ethical practices, community service and fervent faith in God. "Truth is higher than everything, but higher yet is the living of truth," he stressed. He himself led the life of a householder. He was happily married. He had two sons. His love for the family did not prevent him from going on long travels to spread his message of the unity of God and brotherhood of man. After his travels, he settled down at Kartarpur on the banks of river Ravi with his family and disciples to lead a complete householder's life.

A poet, a mystic and a gifted singer, his wide travels took him throughout India, neighbouring countries, including Tibet, Sri Lanka, Mecca and Baghdad in West Asia. He was accompanied by Mardana, a Muslim musician friend who played the *Rabab* (a stringed instrument) for the captivating hymns Guru Nanak sang rapturously in praise of the Lord and equality of mankind without discrimination. People of all faiths came drawn by his gentle gospel of truth, love of God and love of all mankind.

Guru Nanak's unique message is for one and all, that of living in love, peace and harmony respecting each other's faith: exactly what the world needs now and for always.

Onkar Singh

# The Divine Reformer

24 November 2007 marked 538 years since the great master came to this world.

Guru Nanak was not born to affluent parents. His father Mehta Kalias Das was a village *patwari*, lowest rung of the revenue hierarchy. Born in 1469 at the western Punjab village of *Talwandi* (near Lahore, which is now in Pakistan), Nanak was the only son of his parents, and born at a time of increasing conflict between Hindus and Muslims. Nanak was deeply interested in philosophy and spirituality from his childhood. From an early age, he was friends with both Hindu and Muslim children and very inquisitive about the meaning of life.

From his childhood, Nanak was a rational thinker. On the first day at school, when the teacher started teaching the first lesson by writing the alphabet, Nanak demanded to know meaning of the alphabet. Not used to such line of thinking, the teacher was helpless and, taking pity, Nanak quickly wrote the meanings of each and every alphabet. Nanak learned Hindi, Sanskrit, Persian and Arabic at a very young age.

When he was 12, his father gave him twenty rupees and asked him to start some business. Guru Nanak bought food with all the money and distributed this amongst the poor. When his father asked him what he did with the money, he replied that he had done 'True business' (*Sacha Sauda*).

As Nanak grew up, he read and studied the tenets of Hinduism as well as those of Islam. At the age of 13, when it was time for Guru Nanak to be provided with the sacred thread according to the traditional Hindu custom, he refused to accept this to the utter shock and disappointment of his family.

Nanak would spend long hours absorbed in meditation and in religious discourse with Muslim and Hindu holy men who lived in forests surrounding the village. In order to make him interested in worldly affairs, his father decided to make him a 'family man'.

Guru Nanak did not object as he felt that married life would not conflict with his spiritual pursuits. Thus, Guru Nanak was happily married while he was still in his teens. He loved his wife and eventually had two sons, Sri Chand and Lakshmi Chand. However, even a happy and peaceful married life did not divest him of his pre-occupation with matters pertaining to his Divine mission. For him, his duty was not confined to serving himself and family. Humanity was his family and serving humanity was his duty.

Now that he had a family of his own, Guru Nanak was persuaded by his parents to take up a job as an accountant in charge of the stores of the then governor of Sultanpur Lodi, Daulat Khan. Guru Nanak agreed and was joined by his family and an old childhood friend Mardana, a musician by profession. He would work during the days, but early mornings and late nights, he would meditate and sing hymns accompanied by Mardana on the *rabab*.

These sessions attracted increasing attention and many people started joining the duet. Guru Nanak tried to lead a normal life but he would not give up his spiritual pursuits. From childhood, his elder sister Bibi Nanki saw in him the *Light of God*. In fact, she is known as the very first disciple of Guru Nanak.

## Life-long journeys

Guru Nanak was thirty years of age when he decided to set out on travels to spread the message of God. Accompanied by Mardana, Guru Nanak undertook long journeys to convey his message to people of the world in the form of musical hymns. He chose this medium to propagate his message because it was easily understood by people of the time. Wherever he travelled, he used the local language to convey his message. He travelled throughout the Indian subcontinent and beyond, further east, west and north to spread his mission. Wherever he went, he set up *manjis*, where his followers could gather to recite hymns and to meditate.

There are many interesting anecdotes related to his journeys. According to one story, when Guru Nanak stopped at Haridwar, he found a large gathering of devotees taking ritual baths in the river Ganga and offering water to their ancestors by throwing water at the sun. Guru Nanak started throwing water in the opposite direction. The bewildered pilgrims asked him what he was doing and Guru Nanak replied, "I am sending water to my farm which is dry." The pilgrims asked, "How will water reach your crops so far away?" Guru Nanak replied, "if your water can reach your ancestors in region of the sun, why can't mine reach my fields just a short distance away?"

On an eastern journey, Guru Nanak visited Gorakhmata where he discussed the true meaning of asceticism with some yogis. He proclaimed, "Asceticism doesn't lie in ascetic robes, in walking staff, or in the ashes. Asceticism doesn't lie in the earring, in shaven head, or blowing of a conch. Asceticism doesn't lie in just wandering about, or in bathing at places of pilgrimage. On the other hand, asceticism lies in remaining pure amidst impurities."

After his first long journey (*Udasi*) spanning 12 years, Guru Nanak returned home, but then set out on a second journey travelling as far south as Sri Lanka. On his return he founded a settlement known as Kartarpur (*Abode of God*) on the western banks of the river Ravi.

On his third journey, he travelled north to Tibet. Wherever Guru Nanak travelled, he always wore a combination of styles worn by Hindu and Muslim holy men. Because of this, wherever he went, he was asked whether he was a Hindu or Muslim.

On his fourth journey, Guru Nanak dressed in the blue garb of a Muslim pilgrim and visited Mecca, Medina and Baghdad. In Mecca, Guru Nanak once fell asleep his feet pointing towards the holy *Kabba*. A watchman noticed this and rebuked the Guru, saying, "How dare you turn your feet towards the house of God." At this, he said, "I am weary after a long journey, kindly turn my feet in the direction where God is not present." The watchman was speechless.

Guru Nanak called himself a slave of the slaves of God. His primary mission was to connect people with God. He said that Faith was the pre-requisite of all devotion and without faith love does not happen. A devotee must not question the will of God and must be in complete, unconditional submission.

After spending a life time in travelling and spreading the message of God, Guru Nanak returned home to the Punjab. He settled down at Kartarpur with his wife and sons. Pilgrims came from far and near to hear the hymns and preaching of the Master, his followers gathering in the mornings and afternoons. He believed in a society where there is no distinction based on birth, religion or sex. He institutionalised the common kitchen, *Langar*. Here all would sit together and share a common meal, regardless of whether they were kings or beggars. Thus, having spread the words of reform throughout his lifetime. Guru Nanak successfully challenged and questioned the existing religious tenants and laid the foundations of Sikhism.

When Guru Nanak turned 70 years of age, he decided to appoint a successor. On 2 September 1539 Guru Nanak proclaimed Angad as the next Guru. When the mantle was passed on to Guru Angad, people realised that Guru Nanak was soon to depart from the world. As the word spread, people from all walks of life, Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims, came to have a last darshan of Guru Nanak. On 22 September 1539, Guru Nanak said, "Let the Hindus place flowers on my right and the Muslims on my left. Those whose flowers are found fresh in the morning, will have the right to dispose my body." Then the Guru drew a sheet over him and lay still. When the sheet was removed the next morning, no body could be found. But the flowers on both sides were fresh. The Hindus and the Muslims removed their respective flowers and cut the sheet into two. The former cremated the sheet and the latter buried it.

Through his exemplary life, Guru Nanak exposed the hollowness of religions with rituals and exhorted human beings to rise above such customs, He never called himself a saint. Instead, he called himself a slave of the slaves of God. His primary mission was to connect the people with the religion and connect people with *The Creator*.

# GURU NANAK AND HIS MISSION

**G**uru Nanak's sympathetic manner of dealing with existing religions of the world is often misinterpreted by those superficial observers of Sikhism who see in our great Guru nothing more than a reformer, who carried a message of peace for everybody, and who found herein nothing to quarrel with. His largeness of view, in holding all men equal before God, is brought forward to witness that he recognised no defects in the prevailing systems of belief. The popular opinion about him is that he was a great Faqir like so many others, who from time to time have been appearing in India to enrich its sacred literature and re-awaken for a time the love of God in the minds of its people. Even genuine lovers of Sikhism, like Macauliffe, have not been able to improve upon this limited view. Nay, even some of the most enlightened Sikhs of today give us little idea of Guru Nanak's religion. The impression left upon the mind of the reader is simply this, that Guru Nanak, whom we profess to be the greatest teacher of the world, was not better than a common latitudinarian philosopher with no fixed principles, who identifies his doctrines at one with those accepted by the Hindus and Mohammedans, and acknowledges the presence of regular civil service of God and is made to commit himself to all the ancient vagaries about heaven and hell. Thus to most people Guru Nanak's task appears to be that of a freelance between contending parties. It is said that if his own work was constructive in any way it was only on the social side—it was only corruption in society that he attacked, not the doctrines on which that social system was based.

Yet, if he had nothing constructive, his powers, as transcendent as they would, must have passed away unproductive and lighted as has happened in so many cases, as Swami Ram Tirath, Tolstoy and so on. If he had brought with him no new truth, no new support for tottering humanity, we, his followers would have lived our little days among the ignoble sects of an effete civilisation, would have passed off and been heard of no more. Indeed, if Sikhism has made a mark among the religions of the world and if it is destined to hold its ground loftily in future, it must have had, in spite of what is appears now, a substantial originality given to it by its founder.

Guru Nanak, upon his advent, found Hinduism a seething mass of moral putrefaction. He detected among its elements a certain superstition, which would make out an end of every which first intended as a means. He saw living spirit had dried up into formulas and formulas whether of contracts or reward and punishment, ever so contrived as to escape making any demands upon the conscience. He struck at the root of this superstition by demanding truth in faith and spirit in worship. He cleared away everything that encumbered relationship between God and man. He recognised no incarnation, no direct revelation, no human intercession on behalf of man in the court of heaven. He preached Purity, Justice, Goodness. He held out no promises in this world except those of sufferings as his successors and followers were to suffer, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer for His sake. He held out no promises even in the next world or the *Kama Dhenu* or the *Kalpa* tree, but the meeting of the Loved One Himself. It was to be with God, to lose one's self in him. The idea of life, the measure of salvation, he taught, is not happiness of peace of mind. To serve God and be able to love him is in itself better than happiness, though it be with wounded feet and bleeding brows and hearts laden with sorrow.

There were many other ways in which he brought true knowledge to bear upon the problems of life. He separated vedantic philosophy from religion and declared it to be mere gymnastics of the mind. Religion was thus to be less a matter of intellect than of spirit. The practice of Yoga may do very well for emptying the mind of desires, but it gives only a negative result. Man remains removed from the love of God as much in this stupid nothingness as when he is troubled by various desires. Therefore he substituted music, the singing of God's praises, for the Yoga as a means of linking the soul of Man with God.

There is another lesson in positive virtue which is great improvement upon the rules of conduct. There are always two sorts of duties what we ought to do and what we ought not do. The world had very early on recognised the latter, and many very beautiful sets of commandments like the Jewish decalogue have come down to us. But by concentrating all attention





on one side of the matter, people had contrived to forget that any other side existed at all. "Thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not do this or that...." this was all that was understood by the word Dharma or duty. This emphasis on the negative side of virtue led to the adoption in the East of asceticism as the highest ideal of life, which ultimately meant the negation of all manly duty. In the West the old code of morals had been much improved upon by Christ, who declared that it was our duty to love our neighbour beside abstaining from doing him injury. It is too general, and therefore, although in itself at very high teaching, has benefited the western world very little. Duty, with the westerner, means no more the service of humanity, but an enlightened prudence. This comes of not understanding the teaching of Christ. Guru Nanak preached a higher truth. To him love was active service, and his followers soon profited by this teaching. One can see no higher record of service in the annals of nations than that shown by the Sikhs, who were taught to annihilate the thought of self and utilise all their energies in the service of God and humanity.

Closely allied with the idea of service was his Vedantism. Curiously enough Guru Nanak differs from the Hindu philosophers most where he seems perfectly to agree with them. So his Vedantism differs from the Hindu Vedantism as white differs from black. To a Hindu Vedantist there is nothing absolutely existing except God and that God is the Vedantist himself. To Guru Nanak, on the other hand, 'himself' is nothing. God is everything. He reduces the thought of self to nothing before the infinitude of God. Humility could go no further.

Now take the relation of man with God, as preached by Guru Nanak. Man and Women are equal before one another and before God—a truth higher than ever preached before in India—nay, even in the entire world except in Arabia. Woman becomes more sacred, her love is even higher than man's so much so that our Guru could not adore God but in her disguise. Christ could not think of a better relation between God and man than that of a father to son. With Guru Nanak, however, a wife's constancy to her husband represented more befittingly the relation between a faithful man and God. A son may not be the constant companion of his father after his marriage; but the wife is always wife, always constant, always seeking support of her Lord and Love. During foreign tyranny the effect of oppression was greatest on the Indian women. What was sadder still, they had lost respect

even in the eyes of their own kinsmen. But, with the advent of Sikhism, where man became more precious in the sight of man, women too gained great dignity and respect, which though not amounting to that exaggerated worship so conspicuous in the west, was yet an unprecedented improvement on the relations existing between the sexes in India. The result was a kind of chivalry unlike anything that had appeared in Europe or in Rajasthan. The Sikh became a knight who had no personal motive, no passion of worldly love to inspire him in the performance of his duty. The sight of wronged innocence or oppressed, weakness was sufficient to move him to action. The Arthurian legends may be likened to King Rama's adventures, the Carolingian romances to Raja Rasalu's and the Armadis romances to the tales of Rajasthan. But for Sikh chivalry we can find no parallel. The knights of all other chivalries belong to the court of gallant Indra, but the Sikh knights belong to the court of whom else, but Guru Nanak.

Woman also gained the religious rights that Hinduism, like Judaism had denied her practically all share in immortality. She had no personal religion, no spiritual responsibility, no claim, no part in the law of God. She was denied all access to holy scriptures. She was to remain content with the mere performance of domestic, social and individual duties, never to vivify or heighten them by the rays of God's eternal love. Poor Indian woman! Even in her happiest role there is always a void left in her heart, which ever-acting piety alone can fill; and she whose portion is to suffer, her whole lot is lonely! What misery must be hers, unless she can lean upon her God and draw from His word the blessed conviction that she is not forgotten, that His love, His tenderness are hers, far beyond the feeble conceptions of the earth. Guru Nanak felt for suffering womankind and gave them their full share in the goodness of God. She was declared (see *Var Asa*, XIX) to be directly responsible for her morals to God. Religious congregations were thrown open to them. They were to partake freely in all religious and secular observance, and no social custom was to hinder them in doing so. Sikh women are to this day seen attending all occasions of public worship, all conferences, along with the members of the other sex, and their conjoint as well as alternate singing, in which they often lead the chorus, must move the heart of every man who wants to see what Guru Nanak did for womankind.

Man who was told before that the body, being the source of sin, was to be condemned, that his continuing to live in the world was a crime. However,

as, taught by Guru Nanak the body was the temple of the Supreme Being and that, as such, instead of being mortified, it deserved to be cherished as a precious gift of God.

Guru Nanak's conception of God was also higher than the world had ever known before. The God of Mohammedans had too much of the fire of Hell and the chains and the rod of his wrath about him. The Hindus never had one God, or if they knew one, it was only at the head of a legion of godlings, a little God:

*In his floating rest and snaky snade,  
Who slumbers on beside the nectariurn.*

With them their impersonal (*Nirgun*) God was too above the world or indistinguishable from His own creation. As a (*Satgun*) Personal God, He came in contact with them only in a supernatural way or through *Avatara* which gave occasion to the rankest superstition. In Hinduism man does not walk with God as in Sikhism. Therefore we do not find prayer much used in Hinduism. Guru Nanak, on the other hand, lived in God as a fish does in water and with God like a wife with her husband. He is in constant communion with Him through prayer.

Guru Nanak's moral laws are written on the tablets of eternity. They are not made up to human ideas and notions about things, which the mere increase of knowledge makes incredible. They are not mixed up with absurd miracles, revelations and miscalculations about creation of the world. The world may change its theories of life. It may overhaul the whole relationship of science, history and what is received as religion, but Sikhism will not have to undergo any change in its creed. The Sikh can only change by going out of Sikhism.

Yet with all this we feel there is something wrong with us who profess to believe in Sikhism. How those lofty feelings ebbed away and Sikhs became what we know them, we are partially beginning to see. It seems we have over the last century been retreating back into the Hindu ranks and have been slowly accommodating the spiritual truth contained in Sikhism with the same effete system of belief, from which our Gurus had so bravely endeavoured to rescue us. Let us consider how, as soon as we were allowed to escape from the City of Destruction, we fell into the Slough of Despondence.

It seems then, from our experience that there is no doctrine in itself so pure, but that the meaner nature within us can disarm and distort and adapt it to our own littleness. Our minds take shape from our hearts, and the facts of experience do not convey their own

meaning, but submit to many readings according to the power of understanding with us. The want of a clear perception of Sikhism has involved many of its followers in strange anomalies in the past and we still have not done with them. These anomalies could be easily resolved if they had been referred constantly to the word of God handed down to us by Guru Nanak. But the Sikhs were not allowed to do this by circumstances. The chosen few, whose presence could keep awake the spirit of truth among the masses soon after passing of the last Guru, were called upon to fight for their lives or defend the weak from the oppressors. They were removed from amidst the common people, who were left to their own resources or had to depend upon professional teachers who now got the chance of renewing their hereditary vocation of mercenary teaching. The Sikh temples fell into the hands of the monastic orders, or other non-Sikh elements ever ready to grasp at mercenary ways. These temples, originally intended by our Gurus to disseminate true faith and knowledge among the believers, became, and through our negligence or helplessness remain the great source of corrupt knowledge and immorality. The converts who came almost exclusively from among the Hindus, brought to the contemplation of new moral forces revealed by Sikhism an imagination saturated with the spiritual convictions of the old era, which were not lost upon them, but were infinitely expanded to engulf Sikhism as well. They could not leap out from their shadow. A Hindu it is said, would eat religiously, drink religiously and sleep religiously. But it is equally true that he would sin religiously. Therefore a man of such training, when brought in contact with a new Sikh would spread over him a fascination which would not be very easy to discard. There being no separate social organisation for the Sikhs, except what was in the books there being no religious hindrance to intermarriages with uninitiated, and so very easy for Sikhs to drift back towards the Hindus, their antecedents. Worst of all, there was no missionary movement among the Sikhs, except local conversions through the personal contact of Sikhs with Hindus. There was no organised effort made to spread the truth of Sikhism abroad. It is only missionary work that can keep up the spirit of truth among the followers of a religion. When this is absent, there can be no idea of progress. There may be faith, superstition and all that, but there will be no sense of truth, no advance in thought.

These then have been the causes of our degeneration in the past. Sikhism is today striving to

return to its original level but circumstances have so changed and the progress of Sikhism has been neglected so long, that to a great extent we will have to fight the battles all over again. The first and most urgent need is that we should reclaim our Gurdwaras from the control of corrupt men, and liberating them from immoral influences, we have to make them the real sources of true knowledge. Then we have to spread correct knowledge about Sikhism and its history. The more exact manner of thought engendered by Science has notoriously made it necessary that grounds should be reconsidered on which we are to believe and show that India was governed for centuries on principles quite different from those of Sikhism. The haphazard attempts to explain Sikhism by identifying it with the old system of thought, which was its special function to replace, will always end in failure. This would do more harm to the progress of Sikhism than if there were nothing more to comment upon our Faith than our Holy Book. Bad pleading in a good cause is the surest way to bring discredit upon it.

Instead of indulging in mere sentiment we should have clear conception of Sikhism and create a homogeneity in the doctrines of our Faith. We should be clearly convinced of the greatness of the mission of our Gurus. At present we seem to be content with the narrow sphere in which the truths of Sikhism are allowed to work. If we had known their greatness we would not have confined them to ourselves. Missionary enterprise in a nation is the measure of its faith. We require enthusiasm, burning enthusiasm to feel the spirit of Guru Nanak in our minds and convince others of its presence among us.

### **Sikh Mission Work**

Guru Nanak was a missionary in the truest sense of the word. His whole life was a life of message. He travelled over a greater part of the land than any prophet has ever done in the world. And when we consider the difficulties in moving about, the hardness of times, and the diversity of political, social and religious regions through which he had to pass during his travels, we cannot but marvel at the energy and patience with which he adapted himself to the everchanging forces of his time.

He travelled over nearly entire Southern Asia; and wherever he went, he left men behind to carry on his work and deliver his message of salvation even to those who had not personally heard him. In the Punjab, several converts took up his Mission. Bhai Lallo was preaching in the North, Sajjan in the

South-West. In Benaras Gopal Dass; in Bushair Jhanda Badi; in Kiratpur Budhan Shah; in Mahisar Mahi; in Jagannath Kalyug the priest's son; in Lushai (Tibet) Devlut; in Behar and Patna Salis Rai; in Ceylon Raja Shiv Nabh, and a host of other workers were scattered over the regions traversed by Guru Nanak. There were centres of his mission in Junagadh, Cuttack Bedar, Johar Nanak Mata (Kumaon Hills), Khatmandoo, Persian Gulf, Kabul, Jalalabad and other places.

After Guru Nanak, the number of converts went on increasing, until by the time of the fifth Guru the Sikhs became a power to be counted even in politics. The mission work became regular, but its scope became narrow, as the forces it had created in the Punjab required constant presence of the Guru there. The *Masand System* did not work for long. Being localised, the *Masands* did not realise greatness of the mission entrusted them, became lazy and corrupt. They were put an end to by the great corrector of evils, Guru Gobind Singh. Then the *Granthi* or the *Mahant* system began. The persecution of the Sikhs called forth all hands to the defence of the Khalsa, and no energy could be spared for any other line of work. The Sikh temples fell into the hands of non-Sikh elements, which lay like an incubus on the much-afflicted Sikhism. After the Gurus, no serious attempt had been made to spread Sikhism beyond the Province of its birth. Our attention was always riveted on something else, and we have not yet realised the great possibilities of our faith. In the days of our rule when there were great opportunities, much was done in the interest of the Khalsa, but mainly on decorative side of the religion.

With advent of the new age, Sikhism seems to have gained something from the west, which is in a way an ally of Sikhism in terms of broader outlook and free intelligence. The new age, with its universal relations and universal ideas subjects every religious belief that it meets to terrific strain and test. Customs and laws which for centuries have satisfied the people's mind are now creaking, crashing and falling to places like an old ship caught in a cyclone. Sikhism alone seems to have weathered the storm.

But the calmness of thought not yet restored, there is for the moment a wave of scepticism passing over the minds of educated people. They do not have any special regard for their religion and like to pass their days in kindly indifference. It inspires them with no enthusiasm. It furnishes them with no motive for action. They do not know that this latitudinarianism loosens even the elementary principles of theology.

It destroys the premises on which a religious system rests. It can talk much in its defence, but the practical effect of it, as the world now stands, is only to make the educated into sceptics or even infidels and to leave the masses to a comfortable, but demoralising life of superstition. Mere negations, which they call liberalism, is a good corrective in the beginning, but is not useful as a permanent measure. It has to assume an organised form and settle in a house of itself.

From this habit of mind comes impatience with the forms and ritual of religion. These people want to live on pure philosophy. They must bear in mind that an ideal, however philosophical, can be made workable only by subjecting it to the real, has always to grow in the real, as Carlyle puts, "has to seek out its bed and board there."

### **Missionary movements**

Even among the educated there is a small elite of men whose hearts burn for the advancement of Sikhism, but being hard worked in other professions and snatching with difficulty sufficient time to learn how complicated the problem, they can but turn to those for assistance who are set apart and maintained as their theological trustees, the Granthis and preachers. In the general scramble for Government Service it goes hard with them to think of self-sacrifices and to make a bold attempt to know the Guru themselves.

It is clear that the chief mission work lies with the Granthis and preachers, and for years to come will have to be done through them alone, until educated people also realise that their indifference is fatal to progress of Sikhism and that the later they come into the field, the harder the task will be.

We have yet to create any missionary agency beyond the Punjab. Our preachers and musicians, the existing spiritual forces of Sikhism are akin to a local Militia, which may be useful in the case of an attack from outside, but cannot be sent abroad on a religious campaign. In truth, there exists no such organisation among the Sikhs at all. For the purposes of religious propaganda Hinduism may not need organisation. It flourishes best when there is no organisation. Like good poetry it suffers when there is definiteness and completeness and modern attempts at some form of organisation may be said to have worked as an evil. Sublime anarchy ! Sikhism however, can work only when different individualities are gathered up into one. Even our prayers are not individual. They are for all. There is no word for which the Hindus or the Mohammedans can gather themselves together

as a whole. Catholics have the word 'Church,' but they cannot include all the functions of a nation, its history, its military, worldly and religious units into one. But the word 'Khalsa' includes all the institutions and activities into one whole. There must be a confederacy or a centralised organisation among the Sikhs, which should send forth religious preachers to all parts of the country. Much money and energy is being spent in different localities in vain. Day after day, month after month, preachers go to the same cities where their lectures are not so much needed as in other places. If there were one central body for the work, it would first hold a missionary survey of the province and then allot the work of different districts possible by local contributions year after year. These local men would meet together to represent their work according to the means and scope for it. As regards money, people would give as much as they can, if they know what it is about and what is at stake. Funds are given for education as eagerly as any other nation because here they realise what it is they give for.

Whoever holds his religion with conviction and intelligence necessarily looks forward to its becoming the cherished possession of every human being. Missionary movement is the most vital activity of a faith. The church must expand or perish in unbelief. One may say we have to convert the Punjab first; but it is an unreasonable and unjust attitude towards Sikhism. Guru Nanak did not do so. No prophet was ever able to convert his country as a whole. We are fortunate enough to have, at least, this foundation. We should carry the message of Guru Nanak first to those parts of our Province which have for so long remained without it. But we should not uselessly fritter away our strength in the plains of the Punjab when the message would be more welcome to those other parts of the country, which have been deprived of the Guru's word. We shall also have to consider the question of different languages in which this is to be handed down to different areas of humanity.

The world is moving a little faster than we imagine. The evolution of our human life has entered upon a new stage, when it will be hard for those who want to play it according to their own pace. The slow communities are jostled out of the common run if they cannot keep pace with others. An ideal before us all is not the province-ideal, not the country-ideal but the world-ideal.

A religion has no right to exist if it does not show any progress along the lines set down by its founder. Sikhism started with the highest ideals of Love, Service and Knowledge more than any religion of that day. Love of God and humanity was the greatest truth preached. It was not mere sentiment or affection but a rule of conduct. But our *Service* of drawing water and pulling *Punkha* has been confined to the temple—a mere parody of the great teaching. We have not learnt to experiment with service beyond the laboratory. We have not recognised that the humblest human being is the child of our Great Father and therefore no service that any man can do to him can be too great. What can be the limit of the honour, the kindness done to my own brother when we are both children of the Lord of all things. How do we feel when we remember Guru Nanak spending his night with a leper, Guru Arjan in Tarn Taran ! But it is the Christian who comes to build an asylum for lepers in the city of the Fifth Guru.

Significant were those bold acts of public service by which Guru Nanak protested in the most effective way possible against the great moral and religious abuses which marked the orthodox Hindu and Muslim life in his day and thereby became the pioneer and example of moral and religious reform. But how many Sikhs now take part in all-India movements of social reform? How many of us have effected the distinction between the Hindu and the Muslim? How many of us have banished the *chauka* system from our homes? It is idle to cry against a system, when we take it as the height of virtue to observe superstitious rules of sanctity about our food. The Guru used to invite Mohammedans to dinner along with the Hindus. Do we do that in our homes ? Do we do it at least on Gurburb days, when we make a show of the Guru's kitchen, which should be free to all the rich and poor alike. No we dare not ! Is there any missionary movement possible as long as we hold on to such absurd distinctions?

Even Hinduism remains untouched, Hinduism is where our Guru left it. It remains, in spite of Sikhism, an unreformed religion. There it lies, a boulder abandoned in our fertile valley by a moving glacier which has long ago spent itself. Our want of duty led the Brahma Samaj and the Arya Samaj to be established. And now the problem has become more complex. Hinduism still stands there fossilised its millions still mumbling mantras as old as humanity

itself, but still unmoved. For our part we have been accommodating Sikhism to Hinduism. Our Granthis and Preachers have been ever ready to turn to the prevailing beliefs of India. The inner truth to the Guru's word is seldom touched. We glide over the *bani* instead of reading it with intelligence as a message from God and hence it is that in spite of our reciting *Aasa Di Var* every day before the congregations, people have rarely learnt what corruptions are addressed there.

In truth, Sikhs, in order to justify their faith, must live better, know better and die better than those whom they want to convert, otherwise there is no place for them in the world of religions.

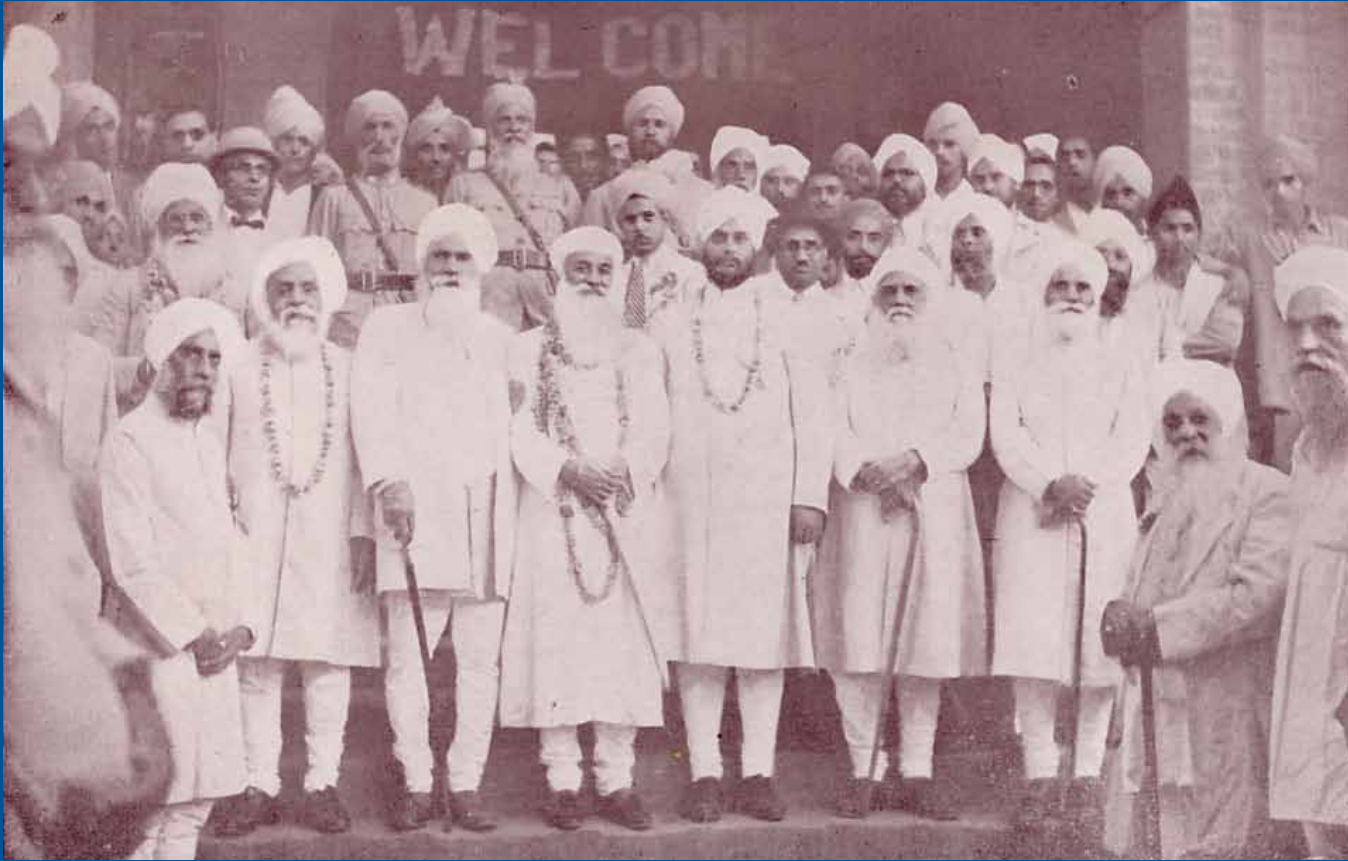
Our preachers, for want of any deep feeling for suffering humanity, often confront people for their absurd ways of thinking and acting. This debating system must be discontinued. To attack other men's gods only estranges their sympathies and creates prejudice. It does not subjugate the will, it only suffices to irritate but cannot convince. Calm and sober-minded men always shrink away from such preachers. A whole religion should not be addressed because the listener assumes the attitude of a champion of his religion, and with this submergence or individuality the strength of the whole religion gathers in him; with the sense of honour and self-respect which hardens him against any personal appeal. Sajjan, the thug was addressed alone, when his only companions were the evils of his soul. The Guru begins with the similes "Bronze is bright and shining" half to himself, and Sajjan is at once alarmed about the perilous state of his soul. Do not oppose Sikhism to Hinduism or any other religion, but oppose the offended Maker to the sinning soul of man and then, as you see, the Guru spoke to Sajjan in music accompanied by Mardana's rebeck. The music works its influence with the nature of man before he is aware who is speaking to him. The change takes place within and soon man is reconciled to his Father.

The man who takes upon himself the task of preaching has first to give up his whole self to Guru Nanak. This complete self surrender to the Guru does not leave any scope for rough behaviour towards fellow-men. When a man gives up his entire nature to the Guru, the Guru himself enters into his nature.

In reality, the world has yet to know the greatness of Guru Nanak and his mission.

Principal Teja Singh

# The Singh Sabha movement



Bhai Sahib Bhai Arjan Singh of Bagrian (fourth from the left, in front) was the first President of the Chief Khalsa Diwan.

## Stimulus and Strength

*R*aison de'etre for birth of The Singh Sabha was re-establishment of Sikh identity and self-assertion and its motivation can be understood in terms of this central concern. The Singh Sabha, by leavening the intellectual and cultural process brought about a new dimension to the inner life of the community and enlarged its heritage. Starting in the 1870s, it marked a turning point in Sikh history, touched Sikhism at its very roots and made it a living force once again. The stimulus it provided thereafter was to shape the Sikhs' attitude and aspirations over the next hundred years.

Under this Singh Sabha impulse, new powers of regeneration came into effect and Sikhism was reclaimed from a state of utter ossification and inertia, its moral force and dynamic vitality re-discovered. Because of their somewhat restricted scope and schismatic character, both the earlier Nirankari and Namdhari movements had failed to stir the Sikh people as a whole.

The Singh Sabha which followed them had far deeper impact, which influenced the entire community and reoriented its outlook and spirit. Since the days of the Gurus nothing so vital had transpired to fertilise

consciousness of the Sikhs. The Sikh mind was stirred by a process of liberation and it began to look upon its glorious history and tradition with a clear, self-discerning eye. What had become effete and decrepit and what was reckoned to be against the Gurus' teachings was summarily rejected, the purity of Sikh precept and practice sought to be restored. Rites and customs considered consistent with Sikh doctrine and tradition were re-established.

With the reform of Sikh ceremonials and observances came reformation of Sikh shrines which, again, was clinched by an impressive demonstration of communal mobilisation and by eventual legislative sanction secured from governments of the day. This period of fecundation of the spirit and of modern development also witnessed the emergence of new cultural and political aspirations, literary and educational processes were renovated and through a strong political platform, the Sikhs sought to secure recognition for themselves.

Reporting on observance of the first anniversary of the Lahore Singh Sabha in its issue for 22 April 1905, the *Khalsa Advocate* referred to the occupant of a *bunga* in precincts of the Tarn Taran Gurdwara who had embraced Christianity and hung a cross on one of its walls in a bid to convert it into a Christian chapel! Worse, as a student called Bir Singh wrote to the *Khalsa Akhbar*, on 12 February 1897. "Near the Dukhbhanjani *beri tree* (in the Golden Temple precincts) there is a room on the front wall of which is painted a picture. The picture depicts a goddess and Guru Gobind Singh. The goddess stands on golden sandals and she has many hands—ten or, perhaps, twenty. One of the hands is stretched out and in this she holds a *khanda*. Guru Gobind Singh stands barefoot in front of it with his hands folded."

A correspondent's letter in the *Khalsa Samachar* of 25 June 1902, edited by Bhai Vir Singh stated. "Around the village of Singhpur, Christians and Muhammadans are becoming very influential. The former have two churches here and the latter two mosques. In this area there is no *dharamsala* and the rural Khalsa is rather neglectful of its religious duty."

An editorial in the *Khalsa Advocate* of 15 December 1904, summed up the situation which existed before emergence of the Singh Sabha thus: "... false gurus grew up in great abundance whose only business

was to fleece their flock and pamper their own self-aggrandisement. Properly speaking, here was no Sikhism. Belief in the Gurus was gone. The idea of brotherhood in the Panth was discarded. The title of 'Bhai,' so much honoured by Sikhs of old, fell into disuse and contempt. Sikhs grovelled in superstition and idolatry. It (Sikhism) had thus lost all that was good and life-giving in the faith."

From such decadent state that the Singh Sabha had salvaged Sikhism will be apparent from this following single instance. Before the movement had got well underway, the powerful Singh Sabha editor, Giani Ditt Singh, who met the raging polemics against the Sikhs with extraordinary literary and scholarly readiness and who was one of the leading lights of the reformation, had to withdraw himself from the Sikh congregation at the time of distribution of *karahprasad*. The reason was that he came from a so-called "low-caste" family!

Such decline had actually started at the very peak of Sikh power. In the courtly splendour of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, Sikh practices had been utterly subverted. The faith was weakened by the influx of large numbers of those who had adopted the Sikh form to gain material advantage, but whose allegiance to its principles and traditions was only tentative. In the words of a character in one of Sir Jogendra Singh's novels, *Rasili*: "We failed because we did not obey the Guru. People established kingdoms and principalities and neglected their poor brethren. The result is what you see – the Khalsa has fallen." But the protagonist is aware of the massive reformation that was taking place. He says, "Sikhism is now casting off external influences and returning to the solid rock of its own pure faith and divine teachings."

In a general manner, the Singh Sabha was an expression of the impulse of the Sikh community to rid itself of the base adulterations and accretions which were draining away its energy and to rediscover the sources of its original inspiration. Unlike other Indian reform movements of the period which were creation of the elite, the Singh Sabha was a mass upsurge. Besides having awareness that Sikhism as commonly practised was corruption of what it originally was, two other motivating factors were at work: a reaction to what was happening in the neighbourly religious



traditions and defensiveness generated by Christian proselytisation and the *odium theologicum* started by Hindu critics.

Christian missionary activity started in the Punjab with influx of the English. Even while Ranjit Singh, the Sikh sovereign, reigned in Lahore, an American Presbyterian mission had been set up at Ludhiana, the north-western British outpost near the Sikh Kingdom's frontiers. The factors for the choice of this area as "the best field of labour" were its "numerous and hardy population... a better climate than the lower provinces and...a ready access to the lower ranges of the Himalaya mountains in case of the failure of health."

With abrogation of Sikh rule in 1849, the Ludhiana Mission extended its work to Lahore. Two of its members, CW Forman and John Newton, were set apart for this duty and sent to the Punjab capital immediately. English and vernacular schools as well as welfare institutions like hospitals and orphanages followed. CW Forman turned out regularly for bazaar preaching. One day he received a challenge to a public debate with a Muslim theologian which he accepted. Six subjects were fixed for discussion and the issue joined with zeal from both sides. The event (in 1862) might well have been a precursor to disputations between spokesmen of different faiths which overtook the Punjab in the last decades of the century.

Amritsar, centre of the Sikh faith, became another important seat of Church enterprise. In 1852, TH Fitzpatrick and Robert Clark, the first missionaries of the Church of England appointed to the Punjab, arrived in station. In the valedictory instructions given them, they had been told: "Though the Brahman religion still sways the minds of a large portion of the population of the Punjab, and the Mohammedan of another, the dominant religion and power for the last century has been the Sikh religion, a species of pure theism, formed in the first instance by a dissenting sect from Hinduism. A few helpful instances lead us to believe that the Sikhs may prove more accessible to scriptural truth than the Hindus and Mohammedans..."

Mission houses were built in the city by the Deputy Commissioner and construction of the station church started. In wake of the Mission came a vernacular school, a high school, a school for girls

and a midwifery hospital. The evangelising work was rewarded with the conversion of men like Shamaun, i.e. Simeon, a Sikh *granthi* reader of the Holy Book or priest), formerly Kesar Singh of Sultanwind, Imad-ud-Din, a Muslim *maulavi* and Rulia Ram, a Hindu Khatri from Amritsar, who had attended the Mission School and passed the Calcutta entrance examination. Sub-stations of the Mission were opened in important towns of the Sikh tract of Majha such as in Tarn Taran, Ajnala and Jandiala.

The United Presbyterian Mission which began its work at Sialkot in 1855 met with special success. The conversion of Ditt, "a dark, lame, little man," of the sweeper class from Marali village was the forerunner of what has been called "the mass movement." "In the eleventh year after Ditt's conversion more than five hundred sweepers (outcaste scavengers) were received into the Church. By 1990 more than half of these lowly people in Sialkot district had been converted and by 1915 all but a few hundred members of the caste professed the Christian faith," reports J. Waskom Pickett in his book *The Mass Movement*.

A catalyst had entered Punjabi life which soon precipitated a vital reaction.

The challenge of Western science and Christian ethics and humanitarianism provoked self-examination and reinterpretation in Indian religions. The result was a vast movement of reformation which took pronouncedly sectarian forms as Arya Samaj fundamentalism in Hinduism and Ahmadiyah heresy in Islam. The more liberal expressions were the Brahma Sabha. Later known as Brahma Samaj, founded by Raja Rammohun Roy (1772-1833) in Bengal in 1828, the Prarthana Sabha began in Bombay in 1867 with the teachings of Ramakrishna Paramhansa (1834-86). The encounter in the Punjab was marked by aggressiveness and acerbity and the last decades of the nineteenth century were filled with abrasive religious polemic in which Christians, Muslims and Arya Samajists all freely participated.

For Sikhism, strangely somnolent since the forfeiture of political authority, this was the critical time. Challenged by the religious and cultural forces around, it was set upon a course of self-understanding. The formalism and ceremonials which had accumulated during the days of princely power were

recognised as accretions and adulterations, contrary to teachings of the Gurus. Survival was linked with expunction of these abuses and the recovery of purity in belief and usage. The following excerpt from the Punjab Administration Report for 1851-52 is worth quoting:

“The Sikh faith and ecclesiastical polity is rapidly going where the Sikh political ascendancy has already gone. Of the two elements in the old Khalsa, namely, the followers of Nanuck, the first prophet, and the followers of Guru Govind Singh, the second great religious leader, the former will hold their ground, and the latter will lose it. The Sikhs of Nanuck, a comparatively small body of peaceful habits and old family, will perhaps cling to the faith of their fathers; but the Sikhs of Govind (Singh) who are of more recent origin, who are more specially styled the Singhs or “lions”, and who embraced the faith as being the religion of warfare and conquest, no longer regard the Khalsa now that the prestige has departed from it.”

“These men joined in thousands, and they now desert in equal numbers. They rejoin the ranks of Hinduism whence they originally came, and they bring up their children as Hindus. The sacred tank at Umritsur is less thronged than formerly, and attendance at the annual festivals is diminishing yearly. The initiatory ceremony for adult persons is now rarely performed.”

The fall in population numbers supported the dismal predictions about final eclipse of the Sikh faith. A demographical detail was worked out by the British in 1855 in respect of the Lahore division. There were found only about two lakh Sikhs to an aggregate population of about three million. These figures related to the Majha region, known as the central home of the Sikhs. The following comment on this point is from the Punjab Administration Report for 1855-56:

“This circumstance strongly corroborates what is commonly believed, namely that the Sikh tribe is losing its numbers rapidly. Modern Sikhism was little more than a political association (formed exclusively from among Hindus), which men would join or quit according to the circumstances of the day. A person is not born a Sikh, as he might be born a Muhammedan or born a Hindu; but he must be specially initiated into Sikhism. Now that the Sikh commonwealth is broken

up, people cease to be initiated into Sikhism and revert to Hinduism. Such is the undoubted explanation of a statistical fact, which might otherwise appear to be hardly credible.”

The Sikhs, roughly estimated to be about ten million in Ranjit Singh’s Punjab, dwindled to a mere 1,141,848 in the enumeration made in the Punjab in 1868. In the regular census of 1881, the Sikh figure stood at 1,716,114. This included the entire Punjab as well as the area covered by cis-Sutlej princely states.

In 1853, Maharaja Duleep Singh, the last Sikh ruler of the Punjab, who had come under British tutelage at the tender age of eight, accepted the Christian faith – a conversion hailed as “the first instance of the accession of an Indian prince to the communication of the Church.” Duleep Singh made liberal donations out of his allowance for Christian charity and the maintenance of mission schools. The Sikh ruler of Kapurthala invited the Ludhiana Mission to set up a station in his capital and provided funds for its maintenance. To quote from the Annual Report of the Mission (1862), “Until the Rajah of Kapurthala invited missionaries to his capital, no instance had occurred in India, in which the progress of the Gospel had been fostered by a ruler.” A few years later, the Kapurthala prince’s nephew, Kanwar Harnam Singh, became a Christian. The Gospel was preached in the neighbourhood of the Golden Temple. For this purpose one of the; surrounding bungas, or pilgrims’ inns, had been acquired on rent.

In the beginning of 1973, four Sikh pupils of the Amritsar Mission School-Aya Singh, Attar Singh, Sadhu Singh and Santokh Singh – proclaimed their intention of renouncing their faith in favour of Christianity. This greatly shocked Sikh feeling. Added to this was a series of carping lectures in Amritsar on the Sikh faith and the narration of Guru Nanak’s life in deliberately garbled detail by Shardha Ram Phillauri, who had been engaged by the British to write a history of the Sikhs. To consider these matters, some prominent Sikhs, including Thakur Singh Sandhanwalla (1837-87), Baba Sir Khem Singh Bedi (1832-1905), Kanwar Bikrama Singh (1835-87) of Kapurthala and Giani Gian Singh (1824-84) of Amritsar convened a meeting in Amritsar. Thakur Singh, man of

learning who possessed the rare accomplishment of having mastered the two classical languages of the East, Sanskrit and Arabic, had been a member of the Golden Temple management board appointed by the British before he turned a rebel. In this capacity he had seen how Sikh customs (and ritual) had become corrupted and felt concerned about the general state of the Sikh community and its resilement from its traditions. As a result of the deliberations of the Amritsar meeting over which he presided, an association called the Sri Guru Singh Sabha came into being on 1 October 1873. The Singh Sabha undertook to restore Sikhism to its pristine purity; edit and publish historical and religious books; propagate current knowledge, using Punjabi as the medium, and to start magazines and newspapers in Punjabi; reform and bring back into the Sikh fold the apostates; interest highly placed Englishmen in, and ensure their association with, educational programmes of the Sikhs.

The Singh Sabha proved to be the *élan vital* in the regeneration of Sikh society. It gained quick support of diverse sections of the community. Many Sikh scholars and leaders volunteered to join its ranks. A vigorous campaign was set afoot. Two of its major thrusts were the depreciation of un-Sikh customs and social evils and the encouragement of Western education. The progressive concern was as pronounced as the revivalist impulse. Initially, supporters of the Singh Sabha encountered severe opposition, were scorned and ridiculed for what appeared to be their novel ideas.

More mordant in humour was the villagers' deliberate corruption of the name of the movement from Singh *Sabha* to Singh *Safa*, the word *safa* signifying widespread destruction caused by the plague epidemic of 1902.

The Singh Sabha ideology percolated to the Sikh peasantry primarily through soldiers serving in the army or those who had retired from the service. One of the regiments had constituted a choir of reciters to go round the villages and sing Sikh hymns in Singh Sabha congregations. The old prejudices were gradually overcome and the Singh Sabha crusade for enlightenment reached its culminating point in a huge Sikh convention held on 14 June 1903, at

the village of Bakapur, in Jullunder district. The occasion marked the conversion to Sikhism of Karim Bakhsh, born a Muslim, and his family of four sons and a daughter. Some Hindus of that village as well as Sikhs from among the audience were also initiated on that day. The ceremony was marked by considerable fanfare. The sponsors were the Sri Guru Singh Sabha, Bhasaur, which, under the leadership of Baba Teja Singh (1867-1933), then a sub-overseer in the Irrigation Department of Patiala state, was very active in purifying Sikh rituals and re-establishing its autonomy.

The Bhasaur Singh Sabha, located in a little village in Patiala state, was among the more energetic of the Sabhas in those days. The dynamite came from the personality of its secretary, Baba Teja Singh. He possessed a fertile mind and was a untiring campaigner. By his stern resoluteness and limitless capacity for innovation, he brought to the Singh Sabha renaissance a new verve and thrust. He was a puritan of the extremist kind, and a fundamentalist in the interpretation of Sikh principles and tradition. He challenged much of the prevalent Sikh usage.

The Singh Sabha in the village of Bhasaur was established in 1893. This was twenty years after the first Singh Sabha came into existence in Amritsar. Bhai Basawa Singh, known as a *virakt* or recluse, was the first president of the Bhasaur Singh Sabha and Baba Teja Singh its first secretary. The Bhasaur Singh Sabha was, from the very beginning, forthright in the rejection of caste and Brahmanical customs which had infiltrated into Sikhism. It openly advocated acceptance back into the Sikh fold of those who had been led into forsaking their faith. It went further and willingly converted members of other faiths who volunteered for initiation.

A Shuddhi Sabha had been established by Dr Jai Singh in Lahore on 17 April 1893, with the object of "reclaiming those Sikhs and Hindus who had apostatized themselves by contracting alliances with Muslim men or women." The Bhasaur Singh Sabha was critical of the limited objective of the Shuddhi Sabha and questioned its very designation, which, it said, was only an imitation of Arya Samaj vocabulary. From its very inception, it had accepted for conversion Muslims and those

from lower Hindu castes. As the records say, at the first annual divan of the Bhasaur Singh Sabha held in 1894, thirteen Jats, six jhivars water-carriers), two barbers, one Khatri and one Musalman (Miran Bakhsh, of tahsil Garhshankar, who became Nihal Singh) were initiated into the Sikh faith. Babu Teja Singh himself published in the press a report of a subsequent year stating: "By the power of the Word revealed by the Ten Masters and in accord with Akalpurakh's wish, the Sri Guru Singh Sabha, Bhasaur, has administered the Gurumantra and holy amrit to a Muslim woman and ushered her into Sodhbans (the family of Guru Gobind Singh). Her Sikh name is Kishan Kaur. A Sikh who had fallen by living with a Muslim woman has been baptized and renamed Ude Singh."

Karim Bakhsh was born of Muslim parents, Nathu and Basri, at Bakapur in 1860. He was of a religious turn of mind. This disturbed his family who, to detract him from his lonely ways, married him when he was barely twelve. At the age of 15, Karim Bakhsh's quest for spiritual company took him to a Sikh saint, Bhai Kahla Singh of Banga at whose feet he spent two years. After Bhai Kahla Singh's death, Karim Bakhsh sought solace in the service of his disciple, Bhai Dula Singh of Thakurwal. For twelve years, he presented himself once every week in the holy sangat at Thakurwal, thirty-two kilometres away from his village.

Karim Bakhsh spent most of his time reciting gurbani from memory. He used to welcome the Sikhs with the Khalsa greeting and made regular visits to Amritsar to bathe in the sacred pool. He suffered ostracism and insults at the hands of his co-religionists. Gradually, his wife was also converted to his way of life.

The story of the Bakapur family reached Bhasaur through Bhai Takht Singh of Ferozepore, a pioneer of women's education among Sikhs. This was corroborated by some other members of the Singh Sabha who supplied further details of Karim Bakhsh's interest in Sikhism.

The Bhasaur Singh Sabha sent its emissaries – Bhai Teja Singh of Maingan, Sardar Bishan Singh and Bhai Takht Singh – to visit Bakapur by turns and assure Karim Bakhsh that his heart's wish must be fulfilled.

Baba Teja Singh issued a public notice signifying that a big divan of the Khalsa would be convened in the village of Bakapur on 13-14, June 1903. The letter included a note on the Bakapur family and its zeal for the Sikh faith.

The invitation widely circulated evoked a ready response. On the appointed day, batches of Sikhs converged on Bakapur from places such as Lahore, Amritsar, Gujranwala, Gujjarkhan, Katani, Narangwal and Ludhiana. An elderly uncle of Sardar Sundar Singh Majithia, Baba Hira Singh, led a jatha from the Amritsar Khalsa College. The group included Bhai Jodh Singh (the distinguished Sikh theologian and educationist of modern times), who was then a student of the final B.A. class, Tara Singh, who had just joined college and who later became famous as a political leader, and Man Singh, who rose to be the president of the Judicial Committee in Faridkot state.

On morning of the start of proceedings, Maulavi Karim Bakhsh rose at 2 a.m. performed his ablutions and came to the site of the divan. He sat in a room rapt in meditation. The Asa-di-Var was sung after which different jathas took turns at kirtan. They included the Singh Sabha of Gujjarwal, Sardar Basant Singh and Munshi Anup Singh of Narangwal and the Youth League of Ludhiana. For a while, a group of women also led the kirtan. Chanting of the sacred shabads went on until it was time for Guru-ka-Langar. The afternoon divan was addressed by Baba Teja Singh, who explained the purpose of the convention and sought from the audience names of those who would wish to be baptised. First to volunteer was Basant Singh, a former Punjab University student, of the village of Narangwal in Ludhiana district, who, after initiation, was named Randhir Singh. He later became known as a revolutionary and, still later, as a saintly personage of much sanctity among the Sikhs.

To conduct the initiation ceremonies the following day, the Panj Piare designated were were Bhai Teja Singh of Rawalpindi, Takht Singh, Zinda Shahid (Living Martyr), of Ferozepore, Bhai Basant Singh of Bappiana (Patiala state), Bhai Sohan Singh of Gujjarkhan and Bhai Amar Singh of Raja Ghuman. Bhai Jodh Singh was named as granthi for the ceremonies.

In all, thirty-five persons received the Sikh baptism on the following morning. Maulavi Karim Bakhsh, 43, was named Lakhbir Singh after initiation. His four sons Rukan Din 15, Fateh Din 12, Ghulam Muhammad 6, and Khair Din 4, became Matab Singh, Kirpal Singh, Harnam Singh and Gurbakhsh Singh, respectively. His daughter Bibi Nuran, was given the Sikh name of Waryam Kaur. Lakhbir Singh won wide esteem in the Sikh community as Sant Lakhbir Singh. He migrated to Amritsar, where his daily routine began with a visit to the Golden Temple. He would reach there soon after midnight, before the doors of the Harimandir were opened, and recite the Sukhmani while circumambulating the shrine. His holiness was universally acknowledged and he counted among his admirers men like Bhai Vir Singh and Sardar Sundar Singh Majithia (1872-1941). His son, Matab Singh, founded a society called Khalsa Baradari and played a pioneer role in the campaign for reformation of Sikh sacred places. Matab Singh's son, Gurcharan Singh Sakhi, took his Bachelor's degree at the Khalsa College at Amritsar and edited, among others, a Sikh religious journal.

The Bakapur divan marked a high point in the Singh Sabha resurgence. It was a visible expression of the new urges which moved the Sikh community at that time. A sweeping religious fervour, a new sense of identity and unity and a decisive breach with the recent past dominated by customs and practices which had no sanction in the tradition were the characteristics of contemporary Sikhism. These were dramatically highlighted at Bakapur.

Singh Sabhas were now springing up in all parts of the Punjab, those at Amritsar, Lahore, Rawalpindi, Jullundur, Ludhiana, Ferozepore, Patiala, Nabha, Faridkot, Bagrian, Bhasaur, Kapurthala and Simla being notably active. To coordinate the work of the Amritsar Singh Sabha and the Lahore Singh Sabha, established by Bhai Gurmukh Singh in 1877, a joint board called the General Sabha was formed. The General Sabha was subsequently replaced by the Khalsa Diwan which was set up at Amritsar in 1883. The Lieutenant-Governor of the Punjab and Raja Bikram Singh of Faridkot were its patrons. Baba Khem Singh was made president and Bhai Gurmukh Singh the chief secretary. Khalsa Diwan became the affiliating centre for all the Singh Sabhas.

Unfortunately, the Amritsar and Lahore Diwans indulged in recriminations and this hampered the progress of the Singh Sabha. Elements neutrally inclined kept voicing the need for a central organisation to unite the different sections. The idea met with reverberating support at a large gathering of Sikhs in the Malwai Bunga at Amritsar on 12 April, 1900. The conference unanimously voted for the establishment of a Khalsa Diwan supreme in the affairs of the community and formed a committee to draw up the constitution of such a unitary body. Among members of the committee were Sardar Sundar Singh Majithia, Bhai Kahn Singh of Nabha, Sardar Aya Singh, District Judge, Sardar Sadhu Singh of the Forest Department, Sardar Dharam Singh, Assistant Engineer, Giani Thakur Singh, Bhai Jawahir Singh, Secretary, Khalsa College Council, and Sardar Gurbakhsh Singh, Barrister-at-Law.

The draft of constitution prepared by the committee was sent to all the Singh Sabhas and to eminent Sikhs in different walks of life. It was discussed at a meeting in Burj Gianian at Amritsar on Bivember, 1901. A larger assembly took place on November 10, which proposed that efforts should, in the first instance, be made to reorganise the Khalsa Diwan at Lahore to impart to it a representative character. There being no response from the Lahore Diwan, the committee decided, on 19 August 1902, to set up a main council of Sikh Panth called the Chief Khalsa Diwan, and nominated to this end the *Chief Khalsa Diwan Prabandhak Committee*.

The first session of the Chief Khalsa Diwan was held in the Malwai Bunga on 30 October 1902. Teja Singh of Bhasaur recited the inaugural ardas. Bhai Arjan Singh of Bagrian was elected president and Sardar Sundar Singh Majithia as secretary, with Sodhi Sujjan Singh of Patila as additional secretary. Twenty-nine Singh Sabhas, including those of Amritsar, Rawalpindi, Agra, Kairon, Chhajalvaddi, Boparai, Dakha and Badbar, a small village in Nabha state, were affiliated to the Chief Khalsa Diwan at its first session. The Chief Khalsa Diwan now became the principal spokesman of the Sikh community and the medium of channelising its religious and cultural resurgence.

(Extracted from *THE HERITAGE OF THE SIKHS*)

By Sardar Harbans Singh

# Personalities of The Singh Sabha

**S**ir Baba Khem Singh Bedi, one of the founders of the Singh Sabha movement, was born on 21 February 1832 at Kallar, a small town in Rawalpindi district, now in Pakistan. He received the pahul of amrit at the hands of the celebrated Baba Bir Singh of Naurangabad. Khem Singh and his elder brother Sampuran Singh inherited jagirs in the Jullundur Doab along with 41 villages in Dipalpur tahsil of Gugera, laer Montgomery (Sahiwal) district.

On annexation of the Punjab to the British dominions in 1849, 14 of these villages were resumed by the new government. During the mutiny by the Bengal Native Infantry in 1857, Baba Khem Singh assisted in quelling a local revolt in Gugera district, personally taking part in a number of skirmishes, proving himself an excellent marksman with gun and rifle. While accompanying Assistant Commissioner Berkeley on a drive to reopen communications with Multan, Khem Singh distinguished himself in a cavalry charge on 21 September 1857. The following day he barely escaped death in an ambush in which Berkeley was killed. The Government of India bestowed on him a *khill'at* or robe of honour to the value of Rs. 1,000 and a double-barrelled rifle. His jagirs were enhanced from time to time and, towards the end of his life, his possessions of land in Montgomery district alone amounted to 28,272 acres. He was appointed a magistrate in 1877 and an honorary munsif in 1878. He was made Companion of the Indian Empire (CIE) in 1879, was nominated to the Viceroy's Legislative Council in 1893, and when the Indian Council Act was extended to the Punjab in 1897, he was among the first non-official members nominated to the Punjab Legislature. He was knighted in 1898 (K.C.I.E).

Baba Khem Singh was most sensitive to the decline that had set within Sikh society after most occupation of the Punjab by the British and on the inroads being made by Christian proselytism. The gravity of the situation was brought home to the community dramatically when, at the beginning of 1873, four Sikh students of the Amritsar Mission School proclaimed their intention of renouncing their faith and embracing Christianity. The Sikhs convened a meeting at Amritsar on 30 July 1873, led by Baba Khem Singh Bedi, Sardar Thakur Singh Sandhwalia and Raja Bikrama Singh of Faridkot. As a result of the deliberations, the society named Sri Guru Singh Sabha was established at a largely attended gathering on the occasion of Dusshehra, 1 October 1873.

Singh Sabhas then began at other places as well. A co-ordinating (Chief) Khalsa Diwan was formed at Amritsar on 12 April 1883, with Baba Khem Singh as president and Bhai Gurmukh Singh of Lahore as chief secretary. Serious differences, however, soon arose and a separate Khalsa Diwan was set up at Lahore in April 1886, his influence restricted to the Pothohar region and to some areas in Western Punjab where he preached among the Sahajdharis, and brought a large number into the Sikh fold. Besides propagation of the Sikh faith, Baba Khem Singh's important contribution lies in the spread of education among the Sikh masses, especially for women.

In 1855, dispatch of the Court of Directors of the East India Company, which initiated a new era in Indian education, was received at Lahore. The following year the Punjab Government established the



Sir Baba Khem Singh Bedi.

Department of Public Instruction and planned to open 30 single-teacher primary schools at each district. Baba Khem Singh lent his full support to the scheme. He also opened schools on his own in the Rawalpindi division, and from his immense wealth, he gave liberally for this purpose and at least fifty schools for boys and girls were opened in the Punjab through his support. On occasion of the marriage of his daughter in 1893, he donated Rs. 300,000 for religious and charitable purposes, half of this amount for setting up a college at Rawalpindi. As a beginning, a vocational school was opened there, in early 1894, with provision for training in dyeing, photography, carpentry, tailoring, etc. Provision was made for subsidised board and lodging for the poorer students.

Baba Khem Singh always lived in princely style and enjoyed the reverence of hundreds of thousands of followers in Western Punjab, the North-West Frontier Province and parts of Afghanistan. He was on a tour in the spring of 1905 when he suddenly fell ill. On 8 April 1905, he left Peshawar by rail in a state of serious sickness and feebleness, and shortly passed away at Montgomery.

(Excerpt from *The Encyclopedia of Sikhism* by S.Harbans Singh).



# Khalsa College

## A Legacy of Bhai Ram Singh

**K**halsa College Amritsar with its magnificent edifice, is a creation of the Punjab's greatest architect of the colonial period, Bhai Ram Singh. It is a remarkable design, but what is more amazing is that it was brought forth in a period when local talent, initiative, creativity was considered a poor second to the inimitable qualities of the alien colonial rulers, who painted India and Indians in very unflattering terms.

The colonials studied and reconstructed Indians as a people "steeped in ignorance, non-scientific and non material, concerned only with religion, and living in the past thus denying the wonderful richness of India" while with the same broad brush, they painted Indian art as "savage, brutal, sex-driven, cruel and

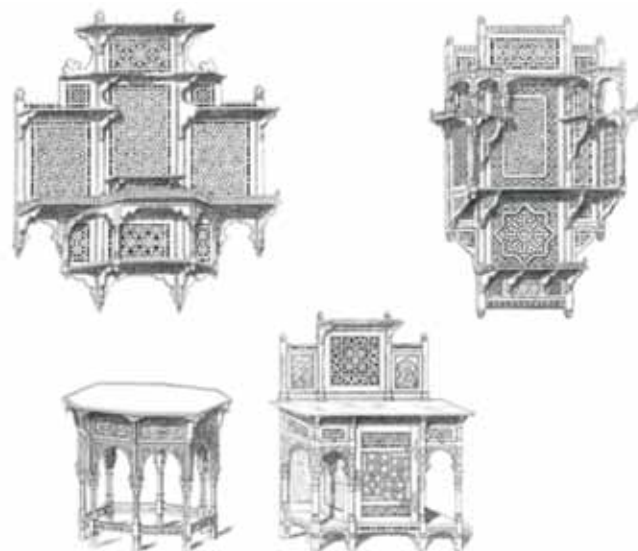
monstrous". John Stuart Mill the famous liberal scholar and philosopher of representative government, worked at the India Office but never advocated liberty for Indians, as he thought them to be civilizationally, if not racially, inferior to the English. Mill was no fool and knew very well the splendid achievements of India in the field of art and philosophy, yet he took this position for how else could he justify the colonial rule of a few over the millions of India! It is one of the many ironies of history that while European nations threw off the autocratic yoke of Kings and Emperors, they systematically conquered and enslaved huge numbers of humanity. On the one hand the British Parliament strove for suffrage and representation for its people yet on the other, it gaily celebrated conquest and humiliation of highly civilized nations such as India.

The British Raj brought forth new cultural and behaviour patterns among people of the Punjab. A large segment resented rule of the *angrez* and turned inward, abdicating the difficult clash of wills. They refused to interact with the new rulers, terming them evil and satanic; they eulogised and romanticised their past, refused to learn the English language and would not send their children to government schools. For them the present was like a passing nightmare. Another segment abandoned their traditions altogether and completely took on the airs and customs of the *angrez* rulers. These represented the native classes that enjoyed benefits in terms of land grants, education and government employment. Privately the colonials ridiculed such people as wanting to be like them – an effort in futility !

A small number amongst the British-educated classes adopted yet another path. This group held onto their valued traditions but was willing to learn from the *angrez*. Theirs was the road most difficult to take. Only persons thoroughly imbued with the lasting values of their culture, yet full of eagerness to learn the new technologies and all that the rulers were willing to teach, could then compete with the rulers with honour and dignity. Theirs was neither the path of abdication from the challenges of the time nor of abject submission; they stood firm and solid on the twin pillars of what was valuable in their tradition and the new knowledge that they acquired from the Europeans. Bhai Ram Singh was such a person in the field of architecture.

This article traces Bhai Ram Singh's early formative period in some detail, quickly mentions his works in other parts of the Punjab, mostly Lahore, and then discusses his greatest achievement: the Khalsa College at Amritsar.

Ram Singh was born to the Ramgarhia Sohal family at a village Rasulpur, near Batala district, Gurdaspur. His father Assa Singh owned some land in the village but owing to financial hardship moved to Amritsar. Ram Singh's date of birth is stated to be 1st August 1858, the year of abolition of the East India Company's rule and a year after the great upheaval of 1857. The preceding decade (1847-57) had been a period of great turmoil in the Punjab, witnessing the end of Sikh rule, uprising of the Indian soldiers of the Colonial Army and its brutal suppression. Therefore it is not surprising that very little of the family record has survived. As may be expected there are a number of tales, sometimes contradictory, about the family



*An amalgamation of Indian design with European requirements in furniture. (Journal of Indian Art & Industry October 1884)*

and the early expression of Ram Singh's genius. Mrs. Rani Sohal, widow of Ram Singh's grandson, insisted that Assa Singh was a landholder of significance, that Ram Singh was educated at the mission school and that the Queen adopted Ram Singh as her "brother". The *Encyclopedia of Sikhism* also, quite wrongly, states that Ram Singh 'attracted the notice of Mr. Kipling ... in Amritsar' when it is a known fact that Ram Singh was in Lahore before Kipling arrived to set up the Mayo School in Lahore. This lack of clarity continued, despite the fact that Ram Singh rose to be acclaimed at the highest level of the colonial society by the Queen-Empress herself.

The most authentic information about Ram Singh's early life comes from a draft of his letter surviving with his descendants, addressed to Sir William Mackworth Young, the Lt Governor of Punjab (1897-1902) regarding his promotion as Principal, Mayo School of Arts. The draft in Ram Singh's own handwriting sheds light on his early life in the third and fourth paragraphs of the letter. He wrote, in August 1899, 'Please permit me, Dear Governor, to thrust it on your Honour's particular attention that Mr. John Harvey first picked me and it was upon his prophetic wishes that I joined the Mayo School of Art in 1875... before that when your Honour was at Amritsar as Deputy Commissioner I repaired and polished Lady Young's Piano and my work was approved even then. ...'

The Deputy Commissioner of a district in British India was a person of great authority and stature. If a piano had to be repaired and polished, and that



too belonging to the mem-sahib, only a person of great skill would have been asked to do the task. It is, thus, clear that Ram Singh had acquired excellent skills by the young age of sixteen. What is equally evident is that he could only have learnt the skills as an apprentice in his family's traditional business. The Ramgarhia Misl of the Sikhs has a long-standing tradition of being master craftsmen, specialising in carpentry. In all probability Assa Singh, Ram Singh's father, shifted to Amritsar, locating himself in or near the timber market, Cheel-Mandi, where carpenter-shops were also situated. It is not clear whether young Ram Singh had any early formal schooling, however, he might have picked up some smattering of the English language in his interaction with British missionaries and officials and come to the notice of John Harvey as recorded in Ram Singh's earlier mentioned letter.

Ram Singh first appears as one of the students of the Lahore School of Carpentry established in 1874 through private subscription, with classes held in the verandah of the Director of Public Instruction's office. It had a somewhat short history and was amalgamated with the newly established Mayo School of Arts, with John Lockwood Kipling as Founder Principal, in a house in Anarkali behind the Bengal Bank. At the School of Arts, in addition to drawing classes, the students were given elementary instruction in reading and writing the vernacular and in arithmetic. Ram Singh, already an accomplished and acknowledged carpenter, began to develop his conceptual and intellectual capacities and outgrew his crafts-training to achieve a deeper understanding of other arts and architecture. Ram Singh, from his student days, had opportunities to participate in practical work and to study the theoretical basis of design. Several of the projects carried out by the School were later acknowledged to have been his work. This integration of theory and practice, study of extant Indian heritage and participation in practical work, was the cornerstone of Kipling's philosophy of art education as imbibed and elaborated by Bhai Ram Singh in his work.

In this context it is significant that Ram Singh, throughout his stay at the Mayo School, never turned his back on his traditions. He continued to maintain strong links with his family and *bradri* in Amritsar, and drew upon them for cultural sustenance and support, and often involved them in the work executed by the Mayo School.

## First Architectural Work: Mayo School of Arts Building

Ram Singh, by 1881, had been under Kipling's tutelage for 6 years, when an opportunity arose for him to work on an important architectural project, the building for the Mayo School of Arts at Lahore. Kipling in his report for 1876-77 wrote that the funds for the building will not 'allow of any lavish expenditure in decoration nor indeed is it desirable... The School of Arts building is, thus, a brick-faced, imposing structure, fronting and set back from the Mall, opposite the Punjab University and next to the Museum. The famous Zamzama gun of the Sikhs, immortalised by Kipling's son Rudyard, today sits on a traffic island of the Mall opposite the building.

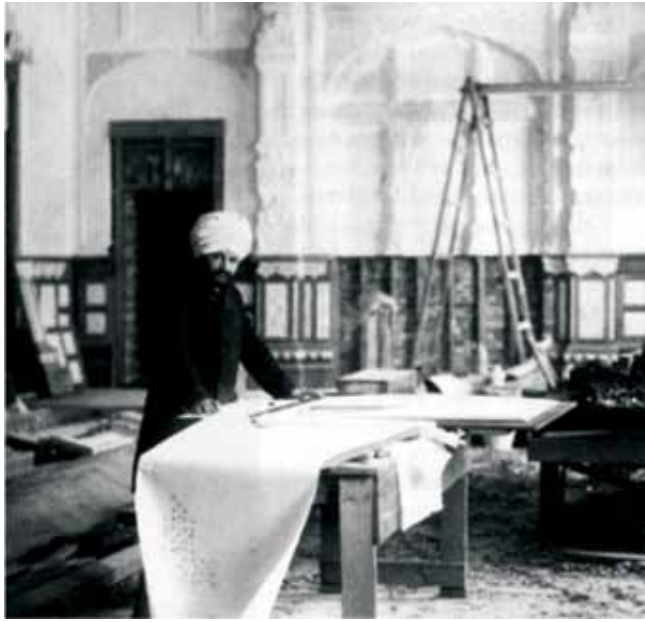


*Designed by Bhai Ram Singh in 1882-83, the Mayo School of Arts building was his first Architectural Project.*

Ram Singh used his skills and knowledge of details of brickwork to humanise the scale of the exposed brick surfaces. He judiciously used moulded ornamental bricks, terracotta jalliwork (fenestration) in the arched verandah openings. The building facades were subdivided into panels and the plinth, cornice, lintel and cill levels accentuated through intricate brick detailing using varying-sized bricks. The corners of the north wing, the main façade of the School, facing the Mall, was emphasised with turrets and chatris, while ornamental embellishments such as the stucco work under the eaves, lent the building grace and texture. A marble drinking fountain was specially designed for the centre of the courtyard.

## Royal Commissions

The first Royal Commission was interior of the Billiard Room for the Duke of Connaught at Bagshot Park in Surrey, England which kept Kipling and Ram Singh busy in the summer vacations of 1885.



*Bhai Ram Singh at work on the Indian Room (Durbar Hall) circa 1891-2.*

The project was conceived as ‘an elaborate arrangement of carved wood in the style of the last century of Punjab wood decoration,’ lining the walls with ceilings of intricately carved wooden panels. The furniture was also to be designed at the School to be in keeping with the ‘Indian’ theme. The work was too large to be taken up entirely at the School, thus, while the ‘choicer panels’ were ‘reserved for the practice of the wood-carving class in the school’, the rest of the work had to be contracted out to carpenters at Amritsar who worked under the direction of Bhai Ram Singh.

The work of the Billiard Room led to another royal commission, this time from Queen Victoria herself, whose summer retreat, Osborne House on the Isle of Wight, had recently been expanded with a large room added in 1890-1891 for holding receptions. Bhai Ram Singh started working on the new assignment and by November 1890, the interior scheme of the new room had been submitted to the Queen.

The work at Osborne House earned laurels for Ram Singh and the press reported him in glowing terms in newspapers of the time, variously referring to him as ‘Professor of Art’ and ‘a formidable rival’ for English artists. The Royal family was equally appreciative and sent him gifts, a silver mounted blotting book from the Duchess of Connaught, portraits of the royal couple, while the Queen gave him her signed portrait and a gold pencil case for Christmas 1891. The Queen commissioned her court artist, the Austrian Rudolph Svoboda to paint his portrait which now hangs at the entrance to the Durbar Room at Osborne House.

Ram Singh also received invitations to be a special guest and speaker from Associations such as the National Indian Association in London, while he was “admitted to private theatrical performances in which several members of the Royal family took part, as well as to other court functions which are generally regarded as being of a very exclusive order”. The Society for the Encouragement and Preservation of Indian Art gave him a certificate for “good work of all kinds”, which was important enough to be mentioned in the MVO Memorandum.

Meantime in Lahore, Kipling seized every opportunity to proudly introduce Ram Singh to the local gentry, referring to him as ‘our most accomplished architect’. One such occasion was when James Wilson, the Assistant Commissioner, Shahpur and the Administrator of the Kalra Estate, wrote to Kipling for a design for a house for Malik Umar Hayat Khan on the estate. Kipling suggested that the commission should be given to Bhai Ram Singh who was, at the time, expected back from England in two months after completing the Durbar Room for the Queen at Osborne.

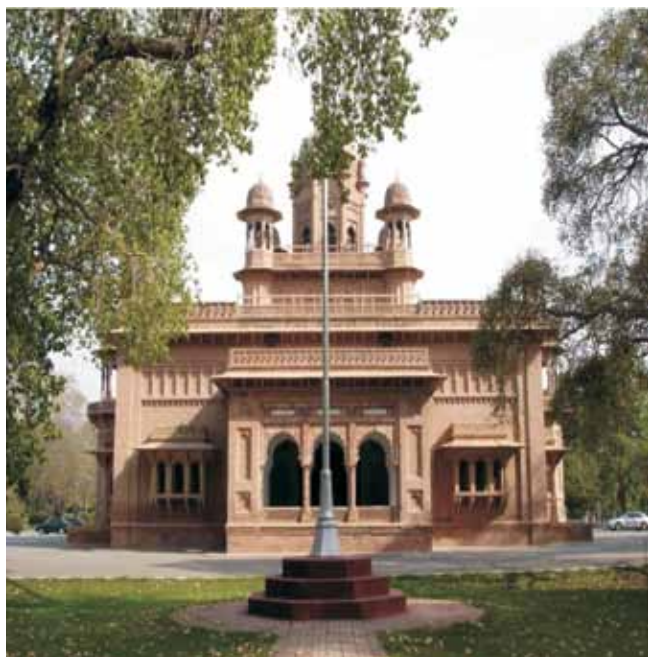


*Portrait painted in 1892 by Rudolf Svoboda, Austrian Court Painter to Queen Victoria. Ram Singh was 34 years at the time.*

This was also the period when Ram Singh came into contact with Rai Bahadur Ganga Ram, the Executive Engineer, Lahore, meeting him frequently over projects where he was the architect and the construction was carried out under supervision of the Punjab Works Department. They struck a good professional relationship and Ganga Ram, throughout his tenure, associated him in several designs of buildings that the PWD implemented. The works that he carried out with Rai Bahadur Ganga Ram were later mentioned in the MVO Memorandum under, 'the works carried out for the Executive Engineer'.

### **Aitchison College: First open competition against the best in India**

Bhai Ram Singh's involvement, in 1886, with the project of the Punjab Chiefs' College, later Aitchison College, was the result of an India-wide competition announced in leading newspapers of the time, for the design of the main building of the College. The Mayo School of Arts decided to send an entry in response



*Aitchison College Main Building, designed in 1886.*

to the advertisement. The decision to pit the limited experience with the best architectural talent available in India showed courage and Kipling's confidence in the young, 28-year-old, Ram Singh. A sub-committee narrowed down the selection to two proposals. They liked the layout plans submitted by Col. Samuel Swinton Jacobs, Executive Engineer of Jeypore State, and the elevations, details, the picturesque grouping of domes, Moorish arches and decoration conceived

by Bhai Ram Singh. After much deliberation it was resolved that the Colonel should be asked to adapt his plans to accommodate the elevations and architectural features prepared by Bhai Ram Singh. This was indeed a singular achievement for Ram Singh, for Col. Jacobs was a highly regarded architect. Kipling, reporting on this in his annual report for 1885-1886, wrote that the Mayo School design 'being adjudged to share the prize with a design by Colonel Jacob of Jeypore, a result which those who are acquainted with Colonel Jacob's work must regard as highly satisfactory for the School of Art.' The Main College building comprised classrooms, play room, Hall, a library and reading room, science laboratory and office rooms. The focus of the layout plan was the Hall, 70 feet by 30 feet running along the east west axis. The composition appeared as a three-tiered building with the centralised hall, like a church nave with high clearstory windows, being the tallest part and the rows of classrooms forming the second tier, while the verandahs completed the composition. Octagonal turrets surmounted by domes marked the corners of the central block which had the hall, while chatris, cupolas, domes and finials were used to accentuate the corners of the building, creating



*Aitchison College, Lahore: the Main Building, southern facade.*

a highly articulated skyline. The porch dome had a composition of smaller domes around it to control the proportioning and visual effect of the composition. The construction was load-bearing brickwork and the façade had elaborate brick detailing at the cornice, plinth and parapet. The brickwork called for, and achieved, a high level of skill; the overall effect was one of a building strong in tradition yet fulfilling the then contemporary demands. The domes and

chattris were also delineated in ornamental brickwork, reflective of the finesse of woodcarving, which was Ram Singh's forte. Eave brackets in red sandstone throughout the building, the use of red/pink marble cladding for the column and the arches with the occasional use of elaborate jhorakas finished in white marble details and some intricately detailed entrances bespeak of the mastery of details by the architect and the intelligent use of colours to highlight features of the building. The verandahs are screened with elaborate inter-lacing Moorish arches and red marble jallis. The interior of the Hall itself was embellished with stucco tracery details, frescos and an imposing balcony resting on sandstone brackets. Unafraid to learn from both the Indian tradition and the new European influence, Ram Singh created a unique composition and highly textured facades, which continue to be lively and charming. This vocabulary he used to great effect in his subsequent buildings, the most prominent among them being the Khalsa College at Amritsar.

### **Khalsa College : His unique legacy**

On Ram Singh's return to the School on 1 April 1893, other commissions followed. The most significant of these was design of the Khalsa College, Amritsar. The Khalsa Diwan, Amritsar had adopted a resolution on 17 June 1883, for establishment of the Khalsa College. Recognising the nexus between religious reform and education, the Sikhs wanted to 'restore Sikhism to its pristine purity' and through publication of 'religious and historical books' to spread 'current knowledge using Punjabi as a medium'. Upon achieving official sanction, the Khalsa Diwan, Amritsar, set up the Khalsa College Establishment Committee in February 1890. The newly constituted Committee appointed a sub-committee in its first meeting of 22 February 1890 with Col. Holroyd, the Director of Public Instruction as President, Sir Sardar Attar Singh as Vice President and Dr. W. Bell, the Principal, Government College, Lahore, as Secretary, along with five Sikh members. Both Col. Holroyd and Dr W. Bell were already familiar with the creative work of Ram Singh at the School of Arts, as well as the various commissions that he had so well executed including the Government College boarding house, and therefore it was no surprise that Ram Singh was chosen as the architect.

Lieutenant Governor of the Punjab, Sir James Lyall decided that the Khalsa College should be located in Amritsar in view of the 'fact that this is without doubt



*Khalsa College Amritsar; entrance to the Boarding House.*

the wish of the great majority of the Sikh people'. He concluded that amongst the five, the most suitable site for the College was the one located on the Grand Trunk Road, in the village of Said Mahmood, at a distance of about three miles from the city and about two miles from the Railway Station, practically the site formerly selected for the jail. It was on the Cantonment side of the railway tracks, which in itself signified a cultural gesture, to be away from the city and near the Cantonment.

The collection of funds had started as early as in 1890, with the formation of an influential deputation to request the chiefs of the Phulkian states for financial support and sub-committees were formed at Patiala, Ludhiana, Ferozepur, Jullundur, Amritsar, Lahore, Gujranwala, Sialkot, Peshawar, Ambala, Gurdaspur, Rawalpindi and other places. A sub-committee was also formed in England at the behest of Mr. Frederick Pincott, who was appointed as President on 16 March

1890, by the Khalsa College Executive Committee with Sir Charles Aitchison as Secretary and members included Baden Powell among others. The first to respond was the Maharaja of Patiala with a donation of Rs150,000 for the College endowment and a cash grant of Rs15,000 for the College buildings. The Maharaja of Nabha followed with a grant of Rs 75,000 and Rs 6000 for the Building Fund. By the end of 1892 the endowments of the Sikh states stood at Rs 452,000 with Patiala, Kapurthala, Nabha and Jind all contributing handsomely, and their contributions towards the building fund stood at Rs 94,000. By 31 March 1894 the fund grew to over Rupees twelve hundred thousand. The construction of the College buildings, however, could not be started because of a delay in the purchase of land earmarked for the College. Meanwhile, the Khalsa School was established on 22 October, 1893 in the house of Pandit Bihari Lal near the Hall Gate, Amritsar, rented at Rs 75 per month, with Punjabi being used as the medium of instruction up to the middle school.

The physical development work of the Khalsa College was entrusted to a thirty-member Executive Committee constituted on 18 December 1892, from the over one hundred member Khalsa College Council, which at the time had Dr. William H. Rattigan and Bhai Jawahir Singh as President and Secretary respectively. Sardar Dharam Singh, Civil Engineer was specially transferred from Bannu and placed in charge of the building operations of the College. It was not till September 1896 that some of the buildings were ready for the school students to be shifted from Pandit Behari Lal's house to the new premises. The first building to be occupied was the boarding house.

Ram Singh's master-plan proposed the main academic buildings of the College in the forefront, facing the Grand Trunk Road, with boarding houses at the rear. The principal's residence along with accommodation for other staff was located on the southwest corner of the complex. The buildings were generously set back from the road and the foreground developed as spacious lawns. The College main building was to accommodate academic needs and thus was designed with a hall, classrooms, library,



*Khalsa College, Amritsar; entrance to the School Wing.*

laboratories and ancillary facilities. The construction was planned in phases and as the classes were already being held in rented buildings, priority in construction phasing was given to the boarding houses to provide proper accommodation to the students from outside Amritsar.

The College boarding house, the Patiala House, for 250 students was a gift of the Patiala officials and subjects, to mark the assumption of the Government of his state by Maharaja Rajindra Singh Mahipdar Bahadur. The school boarding house was meant for 490 students. The plan of the School boarding house was an inverted T with a centralised entrance and six rooms (20 feet by 16 feet) flanking both sides of it, with large rooms of 28 feet by 20 feet at both ends, giving a frontage of 350 feet. Verandahs, with jalli brickwork in the openings, on both sides protected the rooms from the scorching heat of the Punjab. The projecting portion of the T had another 12 rooms (20

feet by 16 feet), placed back to back in a row of six rooms each, again protected by verandahs on either side. The building was double-storied with a large room above the entrance (40 feet by 22 feet) as the reading room. There were also student dormitories and a two-room superintendent quarter, the remaining space left as terraces for students to sleep outdoors in the summer. The ground floor had a height of about 16 feet with the first floor being 18 feet high, the overall height of the building was 42 feet from ground level. The central entrance was emphasised with the use of ornamental bricks with turrets 67 feet high at each



*Khalsa College, Amritsar: a courtyard within the wings.*

end. The monotony of the large frontage was broken by two small side entrances again emphasised through height and façade treatment. Eight kitchens with godowns and attached dining halls, toilets, a dhobi ghat, tube wells for the supply of drinking water and Persian wheels for supplying water to the toilets, were attached to the boarding house. The building was constructed at a cost of Rs 70,000. Later, additions were made and by 1911, double-storied blocks with verandahs on the inner side, were added on both sides of the building, thus creating courtyards. Houses for the headmaster, the medical advisor and sixteen teachers were sited to the east of the boarding house along with quarters for the staff.

The boarding houses were completed and by September 1896, students were shifted from their temporary quarters in the city to the new premises.

Teaching classes were also shifted to the boarding house as a temporary measure by the end of the year. In addition to the School, the College section was started on 18 May 1897 with an enrollment of seven students, using the boarding house as temporary premises. Thus the whole college began to function at site with boarding houses providing accommodation for residence as well as formal learning.

The Executive Committee decided, on 15 March 1896, to add a Gurdwara/dharamsala and one year later on 6 March, 1897 they also decided to build a hospital and gymnasium as a memorial to Sardar Sir Attar Singh, Vice President of the Khalsa College Council who had recently died. The Dharamsala was designed as a high open hall, large enough to seat 500 boys for morning and evening prayers, with ancillary rooms. It was constructed soon after at the site where Sir James Lyall had earlier laid the foundation stone. Because of paucity of funds, due to the waning interest of the Sikhs and the chiefs, other buildings could not be taken in hand. At the time only four buildings had been constructed, the dharamsala, the school and college boarding houses and the Principal's house.

Hectic efforts were made, through the years 1902-03 to raise funds for completion of the essential buildings and for endowment fund of the College with the Lt. Governor, Sir Charles Riwarz, patron of the College, himself joining the efforts with a contribution of Rs 50,000 from the Provincial Government revenues, towards the building fund on his visit to the College on 15 August 1903. Lord Curzon, the Viceroy, joined the effort, urging the Phulkian states to contribute generously. The Government of the Punjab approached the Sikh gentry through the Deputy Commissioners to provide financial help. The design for the Main Building and other structures, the gymnasium, dispensary, workshops and staff quarters was already prepared and estimated to cost Rs 2,50,000. The College organised the All India Sikh Conference on 12 May 1904 and used the occasion to raise funds. While the Phulkian states gave generously to the college building fund and the endowment, the Conference

also adopted a resolution that all Zamidars should pay 6 paise on every rupee of their Government revenue. Thus, by the close of the financial year 1904-05, Rs 328,480 had been collected.

On 17 November 1904, Sir Charles Rivaz performed the foundation laying ceremony of the Main Building and the drawings of the project were displayed prominently and much admired by the Lt. Governor and visiting gentry. The Main Building was designed to accommodate 1800 students, with the College facilities on the front side of an essentially H-shaped building, and the School facilities at the rear, the connector of the H-shape being a large hall, 100 feet by 54 feet named the Rivaz Hall in honour of the patron. By attaching two wings at the rear of the H-shape building, additional facilities were provided for the school. The building was a monumental structure, about 500 feet in length (frontage), with a prominent central entrance leading to the foyer and the hall beyond. Other entrances dotted the façade with two prominent entrances at the ends. The building was double storied; the central entrance was surmounted with a composition of domes at a maximum height of 116 feet with a four-sided clock with six foot dials. This had been originally designed to be higher but one story was later reduced. At the ends of the front part of the building, there were large cross-shaped rooms surmounted with a cluster of domes to a maximum height of 63 feet. A verandah 10 feet wide ran along all sides of the building with multi-foil arches in brick, brackets at the cornice level and the parapet. Small open or dead arches were used at the parapet level to create a lyrical play of light and shade that added to the composition of domes, *palkis* and finials used throughout the building. The monotony of the long verandahs was



*Khalsa College, Amritsar; the massing of domes and cupolas.*



*Khalsa College, Amritsar.*



*Bhai Ram Singh with his medals (from left, Sardar Sahib, Sardar Bahadur, MVO, Kaiser-e-Hind, Delhi Durbar.)*

broken using multi-foil arches running across and the exposed brickwork of the jack arched ceiling. The building, however, took several years to complete, the cost having appreciated to over Rs. 500,000. It was largely completed by October 1910 and occupied by 9 October 1910, but there was still work to be done and the Principal was still collecting money for it in 1916, the year that Bhai Ram Singh passed away.

Establishment of the Khalsa College focused Sikh nationalist sentiment towards preservation of their identity as in the use of Punjabi as a medium of instruction. The British, fearful as ever about 'native disturbances', soon interfered directly and took over management of the College from the Council and gave it to a Management Committee with power concentrated with the Principal and vast authority to the Governor of the Province. The Principal was always British and ensured that the nationalist sentiment did not go "beyond limits". The history of the construction of the College was thus affected and it bespeaks of the underlying conflicts with the British colonists, which finally came to a point where the Government took over management of the College



*Portrait of Bhai Ram Singh by Saeed Akthar, former Head of Fine Arts Department, National College of Arts, Lahore which now hangs in the Principal's Office. The work was commissioned in 2006 by Prof. Sajida Haider Vandal, Principal National College of Arts.*

in 1906. On 25 January 1907 the honorary services of Sardar Dharam Singh were dispensed with and Mr. Ducome Smith, Chief Engineer of PWD was entrusted the task of finding a suitable replacement. The College had become quite a centre of dissent with students demonstrating that a Sikh who understood the concept of *Sewa* or service should be appointed, and not a European engineer of the PWD. Ultimately in July 1908 Sardar Balwant Singh, an Assistant Engineer, took charge of the construction.

The design of the Khalsa College constituted the high point of Bhai Ram Singh's career as an architect and through this project he was able to explore a vocabulary which he used to good advantage in his later works, like the Punjab University Senate Hall (1905) and the Islamia College, Peshawar (1912-13), which he is reputed to have designed and the Khalsa College, Gujranwala, where presumably the Amritsar design was adapted. The major development he carried through from the Khalsa College is his articulation of the skyline of his buildings. His earlier attempts, such as in School of Arts building, appear hesitant, or as in Aitchison College, a bit crowded,



in comparison with the masterful use of the cupolas, domes, *chattris*, *palkis* that he employed to great effect. The central clock tower made an appearance as the focal point of the façade composition which he used later in the Punjab University Hall.

Ram Singh was appointed Principal on 25 September 1910 and retired from service in October 1913, after being at the Mayo School for thirty-eight years. On his retirement, his Vice-Principal Lionel Heath was made Principal of the School on 1 November 1910. In his first report he acknowledged Bhai Ram Singh's long association and wrote in his annual report 'The Principal, Sardar Bahadur Ram Singh MVO, retired from service in October 1913. He was one of the first students to join the School of Art in 1873, and was appointed to the staff 10 years later, becoming Principal in 1910. Sardar Bahadur Ram Singh's talents are widely known, and his long and honorable career is one for the students to emulate'.

After his retirement, Ram Singh continued his work through the firm of Bhai Ram Singh MVO and Sons at Amritsar. There were projects in Lahore and Amritsar, like the Chamba House and the Khalsa College which kept him busy. His great grandsons in Amritsar speak of family stories including when Bhai Ram Singh would often travel to Lahore, dressed in white, in his horse carriage, to visit the projects under construction there; they point out the buildings and havelis that he owned, that are no more in the family possession and the properties in Delhi. The family has some drawings, letters and papers, including the exquisite large drawings on cloth of the 1911 Durbar Royal Dias, rendered in ink, with the domes delineated in golden paint; but they are in a poor condition, the ravages of time and neglect having taken their toll. It is known that Bhai Ram Singh had five sons, Makhan Singh, Sulakhan Singh, Sunder Singh, Sukhcharan Singh, Kartar Singh and two daughters. His fourth son, Sukhcharan Singh was educated at the Mayo School of Arts and established himself as a painter in Amritsar, while another, the second, Sulakhan Singh was trained as an engineer and went for further studies to Glasgow. Makhan Singh, the eldest worked with his father. Bhai Ram Singh died about three years after his retirement, in the first half of the year 1916, in the house of his daughter in Delhi. He

left behind a legacy which for years has been neglected and gathered dust. It is time that this distinguished son of the Punjab is duly honored.

As an architect and a master craftsman he designed with equal facility a building, a piece of furniture, a shamina or a certificate. Ram Singh's impact on the architecture of the Punjab, and Lahore in particular, can also be gauged as a contrast with other colonial period buildings in Lahore: the Lahore General Post Office, High Court, Municipal Hall, Assembly Hall are designed by different architects of the period. Each is a building of merit employing European motifs and vocabulary and with attempts to use 'native' features. Almost all these attempts of mixing the 'native' with the 'European' romanticise Indian architecture with details employed without conviction. They employ the features, the horse shoe arches of the Town Hall, Lahore the mini Qutab Minar version in the Lahore High Court and so on, in most superficial manner, almost turning the native features a farce or, at best, as a fig leaf to cover the European styles. The buildings designed by Ram Singh stand out in contrast to the eclectic structures such as Government College, the Patiala Block of the Medical School and the Mayo Hospital. The less than successful attempts to incorporate Eastern architecture in the City Hall with its horse shoe arches and disproportionate handling of the overall mass of building, also bring into limelight the almost effortless mastery of Bhai Ram Singh's genius.

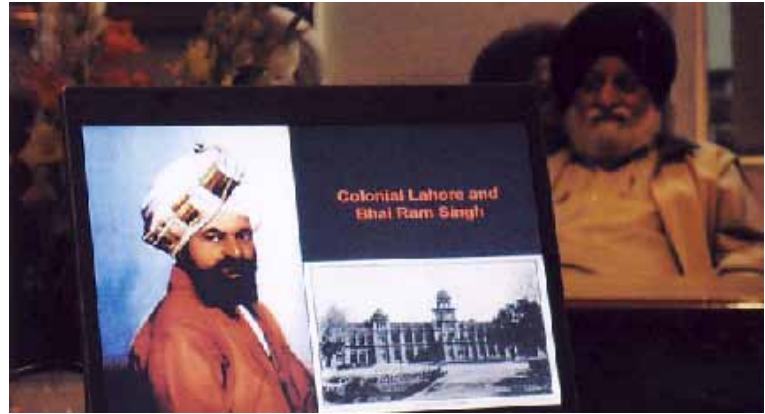
Ram Singh's work, Aitchison College, the Mayo School of Arts (now the NCA), the Lahore Museum, the Punjab University Hall, the boarding house of the Government College and above all the Khalsa College, Amritsar, on the other hand, show an integrity in design with a masterly handling of the details of construction, in proportion, texture and rhythm. Whether it is the mundane feature of the Albert Victor Hospital porch, or the soaring tower of the Punjab University, the lofty domes of the Museum, the playful yet noble rhythm of the cupolas of the Khalsa College, the grandeur of Aitchison College, Ram Singh imparts to his building that touch of genius that differentiates the ordinary from the truly inspired works of Art. Ram Singh continually posed challenges to the brick-makers of Lahore to develop new shapes. He teased out of brickwork the carved texture of wood. His use of the rope motif, the stylised animals, the variation in levels to play with the strong sun of Lahore and the resultant chiaroscuro effects of light and shade give his walls a life of their own. The walls change with the sun, now shining with strong light and later brooding in the setting sun, they convey messages so typically Indian in their complexity of emotions strongly attached to nature and its vagaries.

*Pervaiz Vandal and Sajida Vandal*

## The illustrated talk in New Delhi on 26 November 2007



Dr. Jaswant Singh Neki, with Pran Nevile and Prof Ranjit Mitra.



The illustrated talk on Colonial Lahore and Bhai Ram Singh



Professor Pervaiz Vandal.

Professor Pervaiz Vandal and his wife Sajida Vandal gave an illustrated talk on "Colonial Lahore and Bhai Ram Singh" to a select audience at the Bhai Vir Singh Sahitya Sadan, in New Delhi on 26 November 2007, first introduced by Dr Mohinder Singh, Director of the Sadan.

While Pran Nevile presided at the function, Prof. Ranjit Mitra was the Chief Guest and in his penultimate speech, Dr Jaswant Singh Neki made an emotional recollection of Bhai



S. Anup Singh, Dr. Amrik Singh, Dr. Jaswant Singh Neki with the Vandals.



Begum Sajida Vandal.

Ram Singh whose brilliant architectural genius has been the focus of research by the brilliant husband and wife architectural team from Lahore.

Prof. Pervaiz Vandal is a leading scholar and former Professor of Department of Architecture, University of Engineering and Technology, Lahore. His wife Mrs Sajida Vandal, former Professor of Architecture is Principal of the National College of Arts, Lahore. The couple have co-authored an excellent book on 'The Raj, Lahore and Bhai Ram Singh', and were visiting India to deliver lectures at the Khalsa College, Amritsar and INTACH, New Delhi. Through the medium of their book, the Vandals have made signal contribution in highlighting the role of Bhai Ram Singh who took over as the first Indian Principal of Mayo College of Arts at Lahore, from John Lockwood Kipling. Bhai Ram Singh designed the most important buildings in Lahore, the Kapurthala and other palaces, the Khalsa College, Amritsar and the Durbar Room in Queen Victoria's Summer Palace in Osborne House on the Isle of Wight.

# Flight out of Punjab



**B**road roads, palatial *havelis* bordering wheat fields and freshly acquired affluence. Welcome to the NRI belt of the Punjab where all roads lead out of the country! In the villages of the Doaba (comprising Jalandhar, Hoshiarpur, Nawanshahr and Kapurthala), every family aspires to send its son or daughter abroad. Many have succeeded and it's their money sent back that is slowly transforming Punjab's rural landscape.

In rural Hoshiarpur and Jalandhar, for instance, the bungalows and *havelis* of the NRIs are eye-catching. Some flaunt concrete models of planes on their roofs, others have gone for falcons and footballs. The *havelis* are empty for most of the year. But once or twice every year, the NRIs visit their homes, driving up in their flashy cars, laden with gifts.

Other buildings are coming up fast. Western Union outlets, financing companies and travel agencies dot the landscape. And somewhere among these spiralling constructions, a few single-storey houses stand out like aberrations. Houses, perhaps, of families who couldn't send any of their members abroad.

It was in this land of *kaboortarbazi*, as the immigration racket in Punjab is called, that the Delhi Police came calling recently. The team visited three Hoshiarpur villages, nestling Tanda town. They were probing the case of BJP MP Babubhai Katara, who was caught at the Delhi-International Airport, boarding a flight to Toronto along with Paramjeet Kaur from Talli village, posing as his wife and 14-year-old Amarjeet Singh from Jalapur, impersonating as his son. They also visited Salempur village, looking for a travel agent, called Santu.

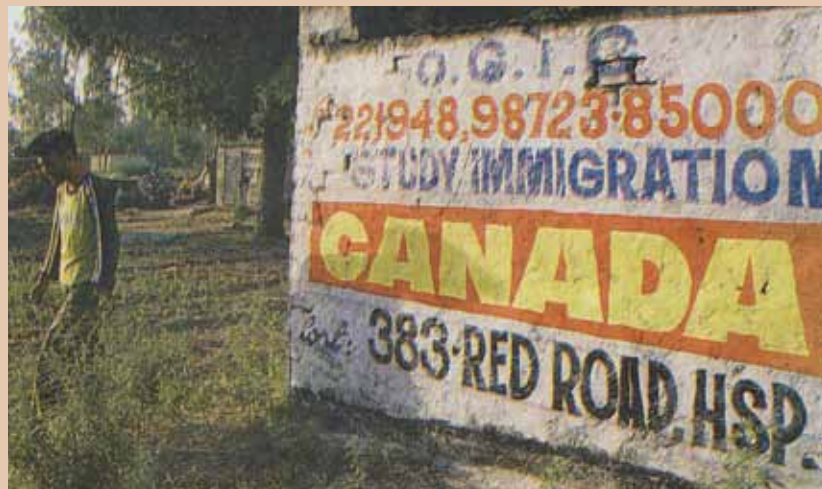
The police team met with little success. Santu had disappeared from his village and the families of Paramjeet and Amarjeet are in Delhi, trying to secure their bail. In Talli, Paramjeet's three-storeyed *haveli* lies locked. Neighbours take it upon them to recount her saga. Similarly, the house of Amarjeet – whose father Jaswant Singh is apparently a leader of the Shiromani Akali Dal (Badal) who runs a tent-house business in Jalalpur – too is deserted.

In Salempur, Santu's mother Tarshada is alone, suffering from a bout of high-blood pressure. "We disinherited Santu two years ago and don't know where he is. It was only when the Delhi Police came to our house that we learnt about his activities," she said. But neighbours concede quietly that Santu was living in this decrepit house till the Katara case hit the headlines.

The recent excitement and the imminent police crackdown on travel agents have not changed one thing in the villages of Talli, Jalalpur and Salempur. Everyone harbours a wish to go abroad, whatever be the cost. They are willing to pawn their jewellery, sell their land, do anything to get their hands on the big ticket.

What fuels this flight? Unemployment, rising prices and the drudgery of tilling depleted landholdings, answer the villagers. "Everyone who is left in the village wants to go abroad," say the crowd outside Amarjeet's deserted house. "The travel agents come door-to-door telling us the paperwork will be done for a price within a couple of days. We think everything is legal. Now they have all gone underground," says a farmer, Shingara Singh.

An ageing Harbans Kaur speaks for the entire village. Waving at the imposing building, constructed by the NRIs, she says, "*Jo chale gaye unaada*



*ei sab hau. Jo nahin gaye, unaada kala kuan* (Those who went have all these. Those did not have only a black well)."

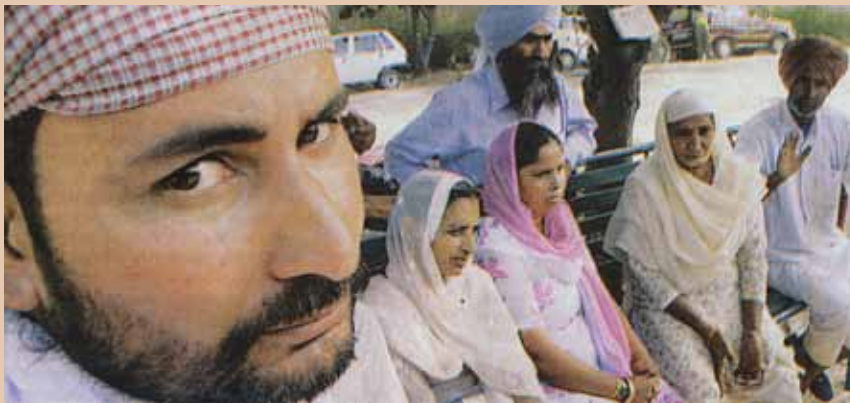
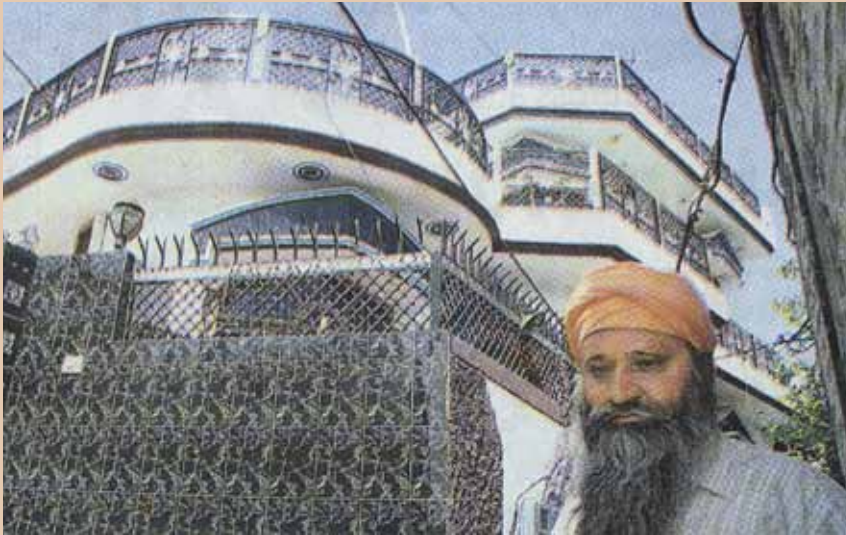
Punjab's flourishing immigration racket reflects a deeper socio-economic phenomenon where people are willing to cross multiple borders, hide in ships as stowaways, impersonate, apply for asylum or exhaust an entire life's savings to get a passage abroad. Every major immigration and human trafficking scandal, like the Malta boat tragedy, the Daler Mehndi case, the ICCR case and now the MP immigration scam, exposes the lengths to which the enterprising Punjabi can go to leave Indian shores.

The recently appointed Punjab Police chief NPS Aulakh admits to difficulties in trying to bust the illegal immigration network. "How can you stop people from trying to go abroad? We are contemplating a series of actions and trying to cleanse the system. In my first meeting with the senior officers of all districts. I also reviewed the cases booked against travel agents who run such rackets."

Figures maintained by the Punjab Police of action taken against unscrupulous travel agents reveal just the tip of the iceberg as thousands of cases go undetected. They show that in 2005, 594 cases were registered resulting in the arrest of 655 travel agents. In 2006, 751 cases were filed, with 755 travel agents being booked. In the first three months of 2007, 159 cases had already been registered and 57 travel agents arrested.

The graph shows a sharp upswing in the number of detected cases. But the problem, explain several senior police officers, is that a case is only registered if the complainant gets duped by the travel agent. Says SK Jain, Inspector General of Police (Chandigarh), "The pattern we notice is that once a case is registered, the travel agent and the complainant often reach a compromise and we have to close the case."

Added Additional Director General (Crime), GD Pandey, "The large number of cases booked by us reflect a social phenomenon and the psyche of the people of Punjab. Educating the masses about the need to follow legal immigration procedures is the only thing that



will stem the rot." The police in Punjab, he says, have a fairly high conviction rate of about 60 per cent for cases involving travel agents.

The Katara case, in one sense, fits into the familiar pattern of major immigration and human trafficking scandals, where a petty sub-agent like Santu first scouts for clients in rural hamlets and collects a token advance. Then, a more prosperous middleman takes over (in the Katara case, the paan-shop owner, Sunder Lal Yadav). Finally, there is the facilitator, sometimes a rare VIP like the BJP MP.

Among the districts of Punjab, Jalandhar has emerged as a major hub of the racket. So much so that it has prompted the government to put up a board at the state's Central Passport Office, listing authorised travel agencies.

But hundreds of unregistered travel agents continue to do brisk business. Police officers say that in the entire state the percentage of unregistered agents could be as high as 90 per cent. In 2007, 76 cases had been registered against travel agents by the Jalandhar Police and as Superintendent of Police Satinder Singh says, "What we have noticed is that once a travel agent involved in a fake immigration case gets bail in two or three months time, he gets back to business. Also, there is always a Delhi angle to major immigration scams. While the agents lure

people from Punjab, the big sharks operate from Delhi and Mumbai."

In a vast majority of detected cases, there is an element of clever forgery involved too. It is either the visas or the sponsorship letters that are forged using sophisticated computer scans. Senior police officers also admit that complicity of Indians working as visa counsellors in missions located in New Delhi have come to light along with hundreds of cases of impersonation.

"People in Punjab will go to any extent to get their passports stamped with the important visa. There are cases where people have arranged fake marriages, thrown wedding banquets, even gone for honeymoons to prove they are man and wife to the visa officer," reveals Satinder Singh.

During the Congress regime, the Punjab Government made a serious attempt to streamline immigration laws and draft a tough law that would also bring the complainant into its ambit. Kuljit Singh Hayer, president of the Punjab Travel Agents Association, says that they were all consulted about the provisions of the proposed new law but nothing came out of the exercise.

"Nothing will change in the Punjab with the travel agents involved in these frauds being booked only for cheating," he says. "The laws and the punishment have to be made much, much more stringent. And the person who pays the agents to enter into an illegal arrangement must all come under the scope of police action."

Till then the pigeons will continue to fly out of the Punjab.

*Ritu Sarin*

# Taxi Comfort from New Delhi to New York

Taxi drivers in the Capital of India, New Delhi, are often Sikhs, highly regarded by foreigners and other Indians especially when travelling long destinations particularly at night. Legendary is their honesty as exemplified recently with a passenger from Moscow being traced by his taxi driver Devinder Singh who returned his brief case containing valuable documents and lakhs of Rupees.

There are some 20,646 registered taxis in New Delhi, mostly the ubiquitous black-and-yellow Ambassador from Hindustan Motors, now with a streak of green depicting their 'clean environmental', CNG propulsion.

10,000 miles away in New York, there are many hundreds of Sikhs driving the 11,344 yellow-painted Ford Crown Victorias (plus an interesting recent mix of SUVs, minivans and hybrids). Taxis are more vital in New York City than in any other city in the USA, providing customised transportation without worry.



It is always comforting to arrive at JFK airport in New York, get into a yellow cab driven by a Sikh who regales you with the latest 'gup shup' in the 'Big Apple' as he swiftly drives you to down town Manhattan!



# Chalo Amrika!

## Farmers from the Punjab head for California and Canada.

An ageing population in Canada and the USA has opened up greener pastures for Indian farmers. Faced with divided holdings making farming less profitable, scores of farmers who drove the *green revolution* in Punjab are choosing the West each year and making use of relaxed visa rules to exploit the land from California to Ontario.

In the past five years, hundreds of farmers have sold their property in Punjab and migrated to Canada and the US, according to data from various immigration agencies that help these farmers to go abroad. Another 1,000 farmers are waiting in the wings to catch the first flight out westwards.

"In Ontario, \$ 150,000 Canadian (approximately Rs 60 to 70 lakh) will get you a massive chunk of

farmland. That is enough to help you lead a fairly wealthy lifestyle in that country", states JS Ahluwalia of WWICS Worldwide Immigration and Consultancy Services.

Raj Karan Singh Boparai, a Batala farmer's son, who quit his job as a transport department chief engineer in 1990, is an example. "I went to California and bought 250 acres of land in Sacramento, the state's capital. At present, I have invested everything in grape farming" he said.

The first few like Boparai wandered into the immigration gold mine accidentally, but as word of quick returns got around, others who could afford it started queuing up.

Punjab's authorities think that all this is good and dismiss those critics who call it an "agri-drain". NS Kalsi, Commissioner NRIs in the Punjab government, is happy that the hard-working Punjabi farmer is getting global recognition. His only gripe



*From tractors in the Punjab...*

is they aren't being routed through the state's NRI Department. "We would definitely promote such immigrations in future", Kalsi said.

Boparai says farmers from the middle-strata in India got all the luxuries of life they aspired for after shifting to the West – swanky mansion luxury cars and good education for their kids.

Boparai, however, believes that Indian schools are better and keeps shuttling between India and California to see his kids who are enrolled here. "I chose India as I thought it was important for them to know about their motherland and Indian culture".

What appeals to most farmers are cheap real estate rates in the US and Canadian countryside – a lot more easily affordable than land in India. The sparse and scattered population in these countryside helps, as do incentives for farmers like heavy subsidies. And, the West – faced with similar urbanisation crisis as the one inflicting Indian youth – is more than willing to make up its shortage by importing farmhands.

Each year, both Canada and the USA, after announcing shortfalls in the farm sector, invite applications from farmers. Immigration agencies, which are in touch with the embassies, then start tapping the local farmer population, inviting applications, some of which are rejected at the initial stage owing to doubtful antecedents. In some cases, they even undergo a month-long crash course in mechanised farming at the Punjab Agricultural University.

Once the farmer-immigrants, now somewhat trained in the ways of the West, are short-listed, immigration agencies move on to the next step – contacting vocation



*.... to limousines in the USA.*

consultants. These consultants offer farmers viable options to invest – grape farming, citrus farming, apple orchards and so on. Armed with this data, the new-improved farmers face interviews at respective embassies, leading to an annual immigration of about 40 to 50 farmers to Canada and about the same number to the USA.

Earlier, one could only get a technical visa against a professional vacancy in the US or Canada. Over the years, there has been a 'general leniency' in processing migrant farmers and more since Punjab's "terror tag" has gone.

While the USA doesn't have a separate category, but demands a hefty investment, Canada defines potential migrants as those who will farm for a specified number of years and generate employment for about a dozen people. Paperwork, however, could still take up to two years.

Sahib Singh Sandhu, a farmer who recently migrated to Vancouver from Jalandhar, shifted base after purchasing a 30-acre peach farm in British Columbia.

What most farmers prefer is to retain their ancestral land in rural Punjab. But they fund their immigration project by selling or mortgaging their houses. At best, farmers need to shell out anything between Rs 70 lakhs to Rs 2 crore for large tracts of farmland abroad.

For the past five years, Manjit Singh, once an engineer in Ludhiana has become a California-based grape and citrus farmer. What is a bonus for him is that he still retains land at Lodi, Punjab.

*C Shamsher (from TNN)*



# Sikhs in California's Central Valley

When the first Sikh immigrants arrived in California's fertile Central Valley more than a century ago, they were reminded of the plains in their homeland, the Punjab. Their farming skills, their willingness to work, and their drive to get ahead ensured their rise in status from humble migrant labourers who picked fruit in the hot sun to significant landowners who today control much of the agriculture in California. But agriculture was just the beginning. Today an estimated 250,000 Sikhs

live in California, and they are found in all businesses and professions, making a major contribution to the socio-economic fabric of the state.

The Yuba-Sutter area is not a hot tourist spot like the wine-producing countries 160 kilometres to the west, but it has some of the best agricultural land in the United States, placed between the Sierra Nevada mountains to the east and the Coast Range to the west. The weather is fine. This was one reason Sikh pioneers settled here, the Bains among them. The Bains Ranch office, surrounded by orchards on the outskirts of Yuba City, is well appointed but unpretentious. Trucks and tractors are parked outside near a large, aluminum-sided barn. It is the business hub of one of the largest farmers in the Central Valley, Didar Singh Bains.

At 66, Bains looks like the patriarch he is with his long, white flowing beard and bright orange turban. His great grandfather migrated first to Canada in 1890, and to California in 1920. Bain's father arrived from India in 1948 and Bains himself followed in 1958, 18 years old, fresh from Nangal Khurd village in Hosiharpur. Those were long, hard days. "You know, we came here empty-handed, and I worked like a manual labourer," he says. "We worked really hard, borrowed, struggled, took risks our whole life. God is always good to us." He is known as the top peach grower, but also cultivates prunes, walnuts and almonds. "Some crops are pretty good, walnuts, almonds still get a return. But peaches, no, because there is too much manual labour and the cost is too high." He supplies peaches to big distributor Del Monte, but has recently dismantled one of his canneries in Yuba City.

A few years ago Bains began selling parcels of land to housing and commercial developers. "When I saw the way that agriculture is going, not too much profit, then I thought I'd start to downsize." He still owns about 6,000 hectares of prime California land in the Sacramento Valley and further south, near Bakersfield, most of it near cities. He sees development as a good thing, yet he keeps his hand in farming. "I love farming, but I like to see it make some money on the other end."

The Punjabi's hard work and clean living gained their neighbour's respect, but the earliest immigrants still faced



*Didar Singh Bains's success in agriculture is legendary. His great grandfather emigrated to North America in 1890, ultimately settling in California's Central Valley. The Bains ranch land is on the outskirts of Yuba City, California. Bains is a noted grower of peaches, almonds, walnuts and prunes.*



Dr. Jasbir Singh Kang, a founder of the Punjabi-American Heritage Society, in his Yuba City clinic. The stained glass panel behind him incorporates a motif taken from the golden Temple.

social and economic hurdles. The same attitudes that oppressed African Americans in the South were too often applied to the turban-wearing 'Hindus' or 'East Indians', so called to distinguish them from indigenous American Indians. They couldn't own property and were forced to make benami-like arrangements with trusted associates to buy land. They were barred from marrying local women, except for Mexican women who were often immigrants themselves. Legislation eventually rescinded harsh anti-miscegenation laws and the Alien Land Law. Restrictive immigration quotas for South Asians were relaxed when President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965. Indians could then bring their families and immigration from all over South Asia increased. "In the beginning there was some hate," says Didar Singh Bains, "but you start a dialogue, then people start accepting." After more than 100 years, he says, "people are very familiar with us now. We are part of the community here. We are part of the economy here in California. We have people all the way to Los Angeles."

Newcomers also do well. Harbhajan Singh Samra, 46, came to dominate okra farming in record time. He arrived in California with an MA in economics in 1985. What drew him? "Friends convinced me. I listened to their stories and I thought, let me make my own story." He began supplying produce to Indian restaurants and stores in the days when *tinda*, *methi* and *moolee* were hard to come by. He sold produce out of the back of his pickup truck. Later he opened a stall in the downtown Los Angeles 7th Street produce market. "You have to find your own niche. It's hard in the beginning to start from scratch, but once you create something, you have the confidence," he says.

After 10 years of building his business, the next step was growing his own produce. His first okra crop, planted in 1994, failed. There were serious setbacks. Debts caused him to lose his farm, but he recovered. He bought several hundred acres near Indio in Southern California. Now *Samra Produce & Farms*, which farms about 120 hectares, has customers for Indian vegetables throughout the United States, Canada and Britain. According to a 2001 *New York Times* report, Samra's annual turnover exceeds \$10 million, although he declines to be specific. He credits the American system for helping him succeed. "If you are determined, you can do anything in the world. But in some places in the world it is rough, and in others it is smooth. In America you can do things smoothly," he says. "But you have to work for it."

Dr Jasbir S. Kang, 42, a physician practicing in Yuba City, comes from a long line of farmers, and while he is proud of his roots, he says, "We are not just a farming community. There are 20-plus physicians in this community. In Yuba City there is not a specialty where there is not a Sikh physician." He enumerates the small businesses, gas stations, mini-markets, restaurants and hotels where Sikhs are prospering. They are in construction, banking, engineering. "You name it, they are doing everything," he says. Dr Kang himself joined with a number of enterprising physicians to purchase land and build the large medical centre where he has his office.

A common feeling among Sikhs who have settled in California is appreciation of America and pride in being American as well as Sikh. One reason for this is a belief in shared values. Didar Singh Bains compares the principles of the Founders, embodied in the US Constitution, to those of Guru Nanak. So does Dr Kang, who says, "the Constitution of the United States expresses the same ideals as Guru Nanak. It reads like the Guru Granth Sahib. Both advocate equality and justice for all." Dr Kang came to the Central Valley from Chicago in 1991. Hailing from Patiala, he attended Patiala Medical College and completed his qualifications at the University of Chicago, where he came face to face with American urban realities during his residency at Cook Country Hospital. He is among the new, progressive generation who believe in raising community awareness about whom Sikhs are. "When I came here, as a physician I had the opportunity to interact with all kinds of people," he says. "I realised there was a lot of ignorance. I knew Sikhs were here for a hundred years, but still people knew very little about Sikhs."

Sikhs interacted with their neighbours, but not in ways that conveyed much about their culture and values, "Which I think are very much American values," says Dr Kang. "I felt there was need

for an organisation that is dedicated to help our fellow Americans to understand us better." He adds, "I don't want them to see us as Indians, I want them to see us as Americans of a different shade or different flavour or whatever."

To bridge this information gap, Dr Kang and other like-minded people formed the *Punjabi American Heritage Society*. In 1993 they organised an event for local teachers at a Yuba City high school. At this 'Teacher's Appreciation Day', a dinner party that featured a slide show and Punjabi performing artists, was a painless way to better acquaint the general community with Punjabi culture. "It was overwhelmingly successful," he says. They decided to organise a bigger event, and the *Punjabi American Festival* was born. The older generation of Sikhs had already instituted the Sikh Parade, a religious festival started in 1979 and held on the first Sunday in November to commemorate Guru Nanak's birthday. Didar Singh Bains, a large donor and one of the founders, recalls that tens of thousands come from all over the country to hear the reading of the Guru Granth Sahib, kirtans and demonstrations of martial arts.

"It's a great event," Dr Kang agrees, "but sometimes people tend to treat religious events like they are just for Sikhs, although for the Sikh Parade, everybody's welcome". The Punjabi-American Festival



*Hardeep Kaur, a real estate agent in Oroville, California, likes the life in America but wants her children to learn and preserve their Sikh heritage. She and her doctor husband are active in local community causes.*

## 2007: Sikh fervour sweeps Yuba City

In a unique display of religious solidarity, nearly 100,000 Sikhs participated in the 28th Sikh Parade in Yuba City on 4 November 2007, an annual feature in this city for over a quarter-century.

The 4.5-mile long procession, which featured floats depicting Punjab's rich cultural heritage, brought all activity on the Butte House Road, Civic Centre Boulevard, Poole Boulevard and Tharp Road, to a halt. The participants came from all parts of the USA, the United Kingdom, Canada, Germany and India.

Led by the *Panj Pyaras*, the parade, held to commemorate the installation of Guru Granth Sahib, started at 11 am with the holy scripture being placed on a flower-decked vehicle followed by 'ardas' and a shower of rose petals from an overhead helicopter.

Although preparations for D-day had begun almost a month earlier with a series of 'Akhand Paths' at the Tierra Buena Gurdwara, where multi-millionaire Didar Singh Bains is the president, the event reached its climax with surging crowds packing the city streets for over five hours.

Religious fervour touched its peak with strains of Gurbani in the air even as volunteers from places like Los Angeles, Reno, Sacramento, Fresno and Tracey

got busy at countless stalls all over, serving langar to all. Raagis from the Golden Temple, including Bhai Nirmal Singh, Bhai Sarabjit Singh, Bhai Devinder Singh and Bhai Sukhwinder Singh led the Gurbani recital assisted by Bhai Onkar Singh and Bhai Amarjit Singh Taan.

As the sea of humanity meandered through the streets in the backdrop of the Sutter Buttes, the world's smallest mountain range, enthusiastic youngsters overcome with emotion rent the air with cries of 'Jo Bole So Nihal.' Many of them, born and brought up in America, viewed the parade as a window to the land of their forefathers. As Ejaypaul Dehal, a senior executive at a local fruit processing unit said, the parade provided a glimpse of their heritage which they held so very dear.

In sharp contrast to Halloween, a low key affair four days earlier, the Sikh parade had sparks of boisterousness, generating curiosity among Americans, many of whom also took part in the function.

Among the visitors to the Tierra Buena Gurdwara was California's Lieutenant-Governor John Garamendi, who described the parade as a "great event" of a "great community."



*Leading Sikhs of California at an annual convention.*



*A young girl in her finery at the annual Punjabi American Festival in Yuba City.*

is now an annual spring mela, complete with bhangra, folk dances, songs and plenty of good food. "It took off so well that right now our event is drawing more people than the capacity of the fairgrounds." Dr Kang also helped start a local TV programme in Punjabi called *Apna Punjab*, still running after more than a decade. It provides public service information and a forum to discuss local issues.

Then came 11 September 2001. Of that, Dr Kang says, "I was very hurt about what had happened to our country. And then I was doubly hurt that we were blamed for something we had nothing to do with. So I felt rather that getting mad at other people, as I was an educated person of the community, it's my obligation to help other Americans understand." He, along with other Sikhs, wrote articles, gave speeches and sent e-mails. They raised seed money for a documentary film, *Mistaken Identity: Sikhs in America* that has been screened at film festivals, police departments, schools and colleges. There were no attacks on Sikhs in the Yuba City area, and Kang credits the work of the local Sikh organisations and Yuba City's Appeal-Democrat newspaper, which aided the outreach effort by running informative articles.

Social welfare and education rank high with Sikhs, whose philanthropy is not limited to the gurdwara, but extends to causes that help everyone, from aiding rescue missions for the homeless to running marathons that raise funds for the American Cancer Society. Money is sent to India as a matter of course, often to support schools or hospitals. These concerns go hand in hand with political action, second nature to the Punjabis settled in California, who have been political from the earliest days. They have participated in American politics as candidates, as lobbyists and as campaign contributors. Didar Singh Bains is a member of the Republican Presidential Roundtable, an elite group of business leaders who commit to give at least \$5,000 annually to the party.

Ironically, Dalip Singh Saund, who became the first Asian American elected to the US Congress in 1956, couldn't get a job after taking his mathematics PhD at Berkeley, so he became a farmer. But times have changed, and their strong entrepreneurial spirit and savvy spells success for Punjabi Americans. They all want to own land

and businesses—and many do. John Singh Gill, 42, came with his parents in 1980. He grows almonds on a small farm in Bakersfield; he runs a trucking company, Gold Line Express, in Woodland, whose 70 trucks serve Northern California; and he and his brother buy and sell commercial property to developers up and down the Central Valley. They are doing well and he has no wish to return to India. “I was 17 when I got here and it’s like home to us.”

Women entrepreneurs abound. Those from big farming families shoulder their share of the work and explore new areas of the business, like Bain’s daughter Diljit. She is a real estate developer and is on the city planning commission. Others pursue careers in law and medicine. Hardeep Kaur is a successful real estate agent in nearby Oroville. At her canyon-view house in between appointments, she explains that she just returned from the school where her nine-year-old son was showing his hair to the classmates. “Ever since Gurjes has been in kindergarten we have gone every year and he has shown his hair to the class.” With her help he shares why Sikhs keep their hair uncut. “He wants to do it,” Singh says. Singh and her doctor husband are active in the Punjabi American Heritage Society and other community organisations, and do their part in outreach. “We want to portray the similarities rather than the differences,” she says. She came to America with her parents when she was seven. Her father was born in Dosanj, in Moga, Punjab. She values her Sikh heritage and she wants her three children to master Punjabi. “You can speak or talk, but if you can’t read, how are you going to read gurbani?” Mothers have been tutoring the kids, and a new gurdwara preschool will help answer this need.

Harj Mahil’s boutique, *Indian Fusion*, fronts the revitalised main street of Yuba City’s old downtown. Festooned with saris and lehengas from floor to ceiling, it offers a bright splash of colour to passers by. Mahil says, “I opened this shop because I wanted to create a fusion of design that could be appreciated by people of Indian and non-Indian heritage alike.” Her non-Indian friend Lynn chimes in, fingering an embroidered silk dupatta, “I just love it. The work is so beautiful!” She wants to visit India.

Fusion may well be the byword for the active, community-minded Sikhs of the Central Valley. And while many families weathered hard times, their good humoured resiliency and balanced view of the world have gained them not only acceptance but extraordinary success. The *okra king* Harbhajan Samra puts it simply: “If you don’t have guts you don’t get anything done. If you have guts, you can get it done.” Undeniably, this Punjabi masala brings a welcome piquancy to the American melting pot.

Lea Terhune  
From SPAN



The ‘promised land’: California attracts the world.

# Californian Sikh personalities

**Dr Amarjit Singh Marwah**  
Prominent amongst Indian doctors in America, the name of Dr Amarjit Singh Marwah will always stand out, being the first Indian dentist to come to the US under a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1950: "I was probably the first Indian to get my practice licence in 1954," he recalls.

Deservedly, Dr Marwah is the mentor of tens of thousands of Indian professionals in the USA today, this Los Angeles-based dentist leaving his mark not only in his profession but also in the political, social, cultural, financial and charitable spheres in his adopted land as well as back in India.

Movie stars Elizabeth Taylor and Gregory Peck, amongst many, have been his clients. Counted in his wide circle of friends are presidents, prime ministers, celebrities and business tycoons. His neighbours include the likes of Barbara Streisand and Martin Sheen and he has, over the years, hosted a veritable who's who of America and India.

For 18 years, Dr Amarjit Singh Marwah served dedicatedly as a commissioner for Los Angeles and presided over the Hollywood Arts Commission and the Cultural Heritage Commission. The Hollywood Walk of Fame in Hollywood was declared a monument under his signature, as were scores of other sites in Los Angeles.

Recalled Dr. Amarjit Singh "There were hardly any Indians in America when I landed in New York in 1950. Most Americans had not even seen a Sikh, so they used to call me Young Santa Claus, a younger version of Santa Claus with a black beard!"

Back then, there were barely 15-20 Indian students each in New York, Chicago and Los Angeles. "Altogether, there were not more than 50 Indian students in the USA. India had a great image, but there were few Indians. One could count them on one's finger-tips. At that time, there were two known Sikhs - J.J. Singh Wallia and Bhagat Singh Thind - because of their fight for the rights of Asians and Indians," recalls Marwah.

A historical event that stands out in his memory is the campaign of Dalip Singh Saund to become the first Asian Congressman in America in 1956. "We had close family ties with Saund because his younger brother, Sardar Bahadar Karnail Singh had worked under my uncle, Sardar Bahadar Ram Singh, who was chief engineer with the Railways in Lahore. When



*The Marwahs with Hillary Clinton.*

Saund first contested in 1956, I took two months leave from my teaching job in Chicago and flew to California to campaign for him. His congressional district comprised the Imperial Valley, Riverside and Palm Springs."

Recalling the campaign, "Saund got the Democratic Party ticket under the name of DS Saund, not revealing his full name. Had he mentioned his full name, he would not have got the ticket! Of course, a couple of things helped him. One, he had a very fair complexion and people thought he was a white man! Two, his wife Marian was white. So when we would go to people to seek votes for him, we would put Marian and her daughter in front of us. Only when he was elected did we reveal his full name. Saund went on to serve three terms and I came here every time for the campaign."

Dr Marwah puts up his fingers and counts the number of Indian families in the USA at the time. "You know, when I arrived here, there was virtually no Indian family in New York or elsewhere on the East Coast. Yes, on the West Coast there were 20 families in El Centro, 20-odd in Yuba City and may be 10 in Fresno. That's about all," he recalls.

How does he compare these numbers with the some two million Indians in America today? With a smile, Dr Marwah responds, "The flow of Indians to the USA began only in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Back then, just about all Indian immigrants were professionals, mostly doctors. So much so, that



*Dr. Amarjit Singh Marwah being honoured by head of the Bank of Punjab.*

whenever Americans ran into a Sikh in the 1960s, they used to address him as *Dr Singh* because most of us were doctors. It was only in the 1970s and the 1980s that lots of people came here under family reunification. Then in the late 1990s, we had an influx of IT specialists."

"When I set foot on US soil, few knew anything about yoga and transcendental meditation (TM). No one knew anything about Indian music. Ravi Shankar, Bhagwans Rajneesh, Mahesh Yogi and Harbhajan Yogi were still many years away. Mahesh Yogi, whom the Beatles made famous in the West in the 1960s, used to come to LA at the invitation of an elderly couple known as the Olsons. I met him first in 1962. He (Mahesh Yogi) used to be my patient. I picked up Harbhajan (before he became Yogi) from Los Angeles airport when he first landed in America on 6 December 1968 and he stayed with me for two months. Harbhajan had first met me at Delhi airport that year and sought help to come to America. He first went to Toronto and then came to LA. Those days the hippie movement was at its peak and many became his followers. It's then that yoga really became popular in America."

Tracing his own American journey, Dr Amarjit Singh Marwah says the Guggenheim Foundation offered its first dental fellowship to India in 1950. "I was a dentist in Punjab at that time, and was picked out of the 40-odd candidates interviewed in Bombay".

Young Amarjit Singh landed in New York in August 1950 to pursue higher studies in dentistry. "I was there for one year. In 1951, I joined the University of Illinois in Chicago. On the side, I pursued my masters in pathology on a fellowship. After two years, I got another fellowship from Howard University in Washington DC to do my doctorate in dental surgery

(DDS). After finishing this, I went back to the University of Illinois to become a full-fledged professor. By 1957, I had become a US citizen," he recounts.

In 1959, he went back to India for 18 months under an exchange programme to teach at JJ Hospital in Bombay. "They, as well as the Punjab government, offered me a job but on probation. I had a good job here and didn't want to take chances. So I came back in 1961, though my father wanted me to remain in India."

On his return, Dr Marwah spent one year in Chicago before moving to Los Angeles. Why? "Because of the weather"! In Los Angeles, he joined the University of Southern California as a professor and started a part-time practice in the evening. "I was one of the first Indian doctors to get my practice licence as early as 1954 in Chicago. When I came to LA in 1962, there were a few Indian students here. When I built my house on Baldwin Hill in 1962, it was the first Indian's home here."

After seven years, Dr Marwah reversed his professional roles. "I started full-time practice and became a part-time teacher. There was no practicing Indian doctor here before me," he recalls. Having made LA his home, Dr Marwah soon became a distinguished and identifiable feature of the city's life. There were then few Indians in California at that time. No Indian shops. No Gurdwara or temples. From 1962 to 1969, all Indians used to gather at my place once a month for lunch."

The 1960s saw a big spurt in the growth of the Indian community in America. "As our numbers grew, we set up the Indian-American Society to promote understanding about India and hold Indian functions. Then we set up the Mahatma Gandhi Memorial Foundation in 1964. Its aim was to build a common hall for the Indian community. We raised some funds also, but the hall didn't come up. However, we continued our efforts for four to five years."

Another milestone those days was establishment of the sister-city relationship between Bombay and Los Angeles in 1968. "I was chairman of the Bombay-LA Friendship Society. In 1971 and 1973, we took a delegation of Americans, including film personalities and writers, to Bombay. We even adopted the science wing of the Mahim High School, which is now called the LA High School Wing, and our society gave them \$ 10,000 annually for about 30 years. I still chair the sister-city committee.

In 1969, which marked the 500th birth anniversary of Guru Nanak, Dr Amarjit Singh Marwah donated a building on Vermont to the small Indian community to make this into a gurdwara. "The Vermont gurdwara became the focal point for the community. It was the first religious place in the Los Angeles area. People

used to come here from far-off places on weekends. Some years ago, when we raised a new building, I gave \$ 250,000 for it," says Dr Marwah, who was appointed to the board of directors of the State Bank of India in 1972.

In the 1970s began a long friendship with Tom Bradley, who became the first black mayor of Los Angeles. "Tom was a dear friend of mine. He was a police lieutenant who later contested for the LA city council. I got involved in his campaign, and he was elected and later went on to become mayor of city. He was returned five times, and remained mayor for 20 years. When he died, Al Gore and I were the pallbearers."

Mayor Bradley appointed Dr Amarjit Singh Marwah as city commissioner in 1974. "It was a great privilege and I was the first Indian to be appointed to this position." In this role, Dr Marwah chaired the Cultural Heritage Commission for 18 years. "Under my signature, 300 sites were declared as protected monuments, including the Walk of Fame, the Roosevelt Hotel, and the Ambassador Hotel. We followed an open process under which people could complain and ask the council to overturn our decisions."

A close friend of the late Sardar Inderjit Singh, founder of the Punjab and Sind Bank, Dr Amarjit Singh Marwah joined hands with him to launch the Bank of Punjab in the 1990s. "After his bank was nationalised in 1984, Inderjit Singh had applied to open another bank, but he could secure permission only in 1994. I suggested that the new bank should be on the American pattern. From day one, the Bank of Punjab provided fully computerised services. We started off with a branch in Chandigarh and pretty soon opened many branches and crossed the 150-mark. The bank is rated A-1, and we have an overseas branch in Toronto and have applied for one in LA," says Dr Marwah, who is the foreign promoter and board member of the bank.

Today Dr Amarjit Singh Marwah lives on his 14-acre Malibu ranch, where his closest neighbour is Barbara Streisand. "I had three daughters. One of them was a classmate of Barbara's son."

On his ranch overlooking the Pacific Ocean, this Sikh pioneer has hosted presidents, prime ministers and celebrities. "The wedding of President Ford's son was held here. President Zail Singh, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, Indian ministers and American celebrities have all been here," he recollected.

Having played a high-profile American innings, Dr Marwah is winding down these days. "I am investing in education at my home towns Faridkot and

Kotkapura, where I have started a college and instituted scholarships. At the Mahindra College in Patiala, we are building an auditorium at the cost of Rs 50 lakhs."

Dr Amarjit Singh still serves on the International Visitors Council. "It is a federal agency whose job is to take care of foreign visitors who come to the USA. Actually, it is a PR agency of the federal government with headquarters in Washington. I sit on its 30-member board and we meet each month."

Born at Bhera in the Shahpur district of present-day Pakistan, Dr Amarjit Singh Marwah belongs to a family of doctors. "My father, Dr Chanda Singh, was chief of medical services in Faridkot state in the mid-1910s. My grandfather, Dr Sucha Singh, had also held the same post in 1880s. I did my high school from Kotkapura in 1941 and then went to Lahore for higher education." At Lahore's Sikh National College, young Marwah was a close witness to the Quit India movement that shook the nation. "Those were tumultuous times. Demonstrations were the norm. I used to live in the hostel. Niranjan Singh, started the Sikh National College. While Tara Singh was an Akali, Niranjan Singh was a Congressman. He was professor of chemistry as well as principal of the college."

At college, his contemporaries included Punjab's Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal, former Punjab police chief Bhagwan Singh Danewalia, Indian minister of state (under Nehru) Iqbal Singh, Frick India founder Manmohan Singh and former PGI director Dr Jaswant Singh Neki (Editorial Director of the *Nishaan*). "I knew Kartar Singh, Master Tara Singh, and Giani Gurmukh Singh Musafir who used to stay with my family whenever they visited Faridkot."

After his F.Sc, Marwah joined the King Edward Medical College for his four-year dentistry course. "It was the only college in India with a dental wing." Hardly had he finished his degree when the Partition shook India. "As violence broke out, I moved to live with my uncle, Sardar Bahadar Ram Singh, who was chief engineer with the railways. On 11 August 1947, I left Lahore with my uncle in military cars under police protection. On the way, I saw people killing others ... it was raining heavily and one could see bodies lying around. I was 21 at that time."

From Lahore, they reached Kotkapura. Within a couple of months, young Amarjit Singh Marwah was appointed a first-class officer. "I was the only dentist in the whole of Faridkot state. Within six months, Faridkot merged with Pepsu (Patiala and East Punjab States Union) in 1948 and I was posted in Rajendra Hospital in Patiala, and then in Nabha and Kapurthala."

Then America beckoned.





# Bicky Singh: E-man of many parts, colours ... and turbans

**B**icky Singh, President and CEO of *Future Computing Solutions Inc* and *SecureMart.com* based at Yorba Linda in Southern California, is a man with path-breaking ideas. This net-wired Sikh gentleman finds amazing analogies between his Sikh faith and the Internet. "Every gurdwara has four doors. Which means anyone (of the four castes) can come in. The same applies to the Internet. Whether it is IBM or a start-up company, both are on the same platform. The Internet and the Sikh religion don't discriminate," laughs the man who also, probably, has the world's largest collection of turbans.

This 'techie' has put his religion on the information superhighway to disseminate its message to the wider world through his portal [www.Sikhpoint.com](http://www.Sikhpoint.com). As he explains, "The Internet is a real boon for smaller religions like Sikhism. We are just a few million and scattered around the world. To preserve our culture, we need connectivity. That's why in 1998 my wife and I launched this portal to cater to religious, social, cultural, professional and personal needs of the community – kids, adults and seniors. We get more than 80,000 hits a day."

The biggest problem of Sikh children abroad, he says, is their lack of knowledge of Punjabi. "When these kids go to gurdwaras, they don't follow the kirtan and bani in the Gurmukhi script. Sikhpoint.com attracts this net-savvy generation through animations, video games and fun-filled tutorials, and then leads

them on to exciting sections on Sikh religion and culture. We have another channel called *Sikhpoint Positivemedia Visibility Channel* to portray role models for our kids," he says.

Sikhpoint.com also has a section on greeting cards carrying the Sikh message. "On Teachers' Day three years ago, my children asked, 'Dad, why shouldn't we have greeting cards on the portal? That's how we started this section. Last year when my kids sent these greeting cards to their teacher on Teachers' Day, he said he was amazed by the richness of the Sikh religion. With over 1,400 animated greeting cards in various categories, we have one of the best collections on any Sikh site."

Immediately after Bicky Singh launched the portal, 9/11 happened. The Sikhs were often mistaken for Muslims and became targets of the racial backlash. "We invited California Lt Governor Cruz Bustamante, senators and the press to the Orange County gurdwara to explain to them about Sikhism. This helped the community. In those troubled times, we also launched Sikhmediapoint on our portal to give guidelines to the community," he says.

Bicky Singh also hit upon a subtle way of creating awareness among people about the Sikh religion. "Look, if you try to tell people about your religion, they fear you are trying to convert them. But if you convey your message subtly, people don't feel threatened. That is what we have done by packaging the Sikh message in art form".

Sikhpoint.com designs, prints and distributes free of charge about 30,000 calendars, depicting various aspects of Sikh heritage. "By distributing this beautiful calendar among law enforcement agencies, legislators, museums (like Getty Centre and Smithsonian) and teacher's associations we have made them aware about Sikhism. These calendars carry great pieces of Sikh art by Sikh artists, with a description. These calendars have raised the visibility of Sikh art and artists like the Singh Twins Amrit and Rabindra from Britain were featured in 2005. Some museums have inquired about Sikh art and we are in talks with them," he reveals.

Realising that the Sikhs were targeted after 9/11 because the American people didn't know that they were different from Muslims, Bicky Singh decided to make common people aware about his faith. "The Sikhs were targeted because we never tried to educate Americans about ourselves. With the help of Orange County and Buena Park gurdwaras, we started feeding 450 homeless people in two shelters every weekend. Over time, these Americans have realised how wonderful and generous the Sikhs are. The law enforcement personnel present at these shelters at the time of food distribution also know that the Sikhs are a different people."

Giving an example of how this approach has paid off, he says some time ago he was in Santa Ana with two American friends, "Suddenly, we heard a noise and saw people waving at us. My friends thought I might be in trouble because of my turban. Well, what actually happened was this: some people from the shelter where we serve food on weekends recognised me. In appreciation they started greeting me, I felt great," says the man who believes in unique methods to drive home his message.

Back in India, Bicky Singh is helping people in his own unique way. "Unlike other organisations, we don't adopt villages or children. At our (Sikhpoint.com) office in Mohali near Chandigarh, we train the rural youth in computers. These trained boys and girls have found gainful employment. We want to save the unemployed youth from falling prey to drugs, alcoholism and other vices rampant in Punjab today. Some of these youth have been absorbed in my company's Chandigarh office."

In its Indian mission, Sikhpoint.com has teamed up with some diaspora individuals and organisations. "Look, many individuals and organisations want to do something for India, but they are unable to go there. So we tell them that this (computer training) is our strength and that we already have a presence there. Working with loose networks rather than big organisations helps," he says.

Bicky Singh stands apart from his novel methods. As he stands apart for his colourful turbans! In fact, so enormous is his collection of bright-coloured turbans that he could easily get his name into the Guinness Book of Records for their sheer number. "Turbans are my passion. I may be the only Sikh in the world with more than 500 patterned turbans with matching ties, though I once met a guy who had 200 printed turbans," he says.

He generates his own designs on the computer and e-mails them to New Delhi for creating matching turbans in Ghaffar Market. Interestingly, post-9/11 he created the first turban with the American flag on it. "And I have created turbans for other specific occasions like Vaisakhi, Halloween, St. Patrick's Day, and Independence Day."

Bright colours, he says, are his passion. "When I was a student at California State University, my bright-coloured turbans made people curious about me. This interaction helped me explain my religion to them." His colourful turbans impressed even Indian Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh when Bicky Singh met him in New Delhi in 2004. "The Prime Minister asked me about my turban. And I promised to send him one soon. Even the California Lt Governor complimented me for my turbans, saying their colours are representative of our cultural diversity," says Bicky Singh who serves on the *California One Commission*.

Amazingly, Bicky Singh is not only a great collector of Sikh original art and coins but also a creator of some unusual artwork with recycled material. One such creating is called *Emergence into Chaos*.

Created by him with wood, computer circuit material, auto parts, spent 7.62mm cases, spent 12-gauge shotgun shells, transformer plates, wire, lead, refrigerator parts, tin, brass, oil paint, children's hospital armbands, spring stock, nails, and screws, this sculpture is an expression of his puzzlement at the chaotic world.

"This sculpture came about for several reasons. One, I had interest in the civil unrest in the Balkans. Two, I am fascinated by the ability of humankind to bring forth new life despite this chaos. While growing up in India, I wondered how societies in turmoil still carried on with the most basic of their functions – bringing forth new life," he says.

Accordingly, at the centre of his creation is an infant surrounded by all the internal mechanisms that provide life to the new child. The child is submerged in the soup of stylised DNA, represented by the bits of colour floating around. *Love, Terror, Joy, Fear, Anguish* and, above all, *Hope* breathe in and out of the child's lungs. Her brain is being fed by her parent's sum total

of their imprint, but, more importantly, her mother's imprint, making sure the bloodline is continued.

The child is seen reaching out towards what is the drama of war and chaos. The colours above offer no comfort for this new life, save the white hand of hope, which reaches down to help this new life survive for a better tomorrow.

Below are many pieces of what the mother shares with her unborn infant. Food, Energy, Warmth, Love and Hope are passed from the mother to the infant. What is spent gets recharged and then passed on again in an endless loop until the child has pressed through to life awaiting her. "That's how life has found its way through sine the beginning of humankind," he explains.

Born in Agra, Bicky Singh was raised in New Delhi. After his graduation, he joined the IIT at New Delhi for his masters in systems engineering. "In 1983, I came to California State University, Fullerton, for higher studies. While still a student, I was fortunate to get a job with a start-up computer company in Orange County. I learnt the business ropes with them. The outsourcing of mainframe programming work to India was just picking up in the late 1980s when I decided to start my own business," recollected.

In 1990, Bicky Singh started *Future Computing Solutions Inc* headquartered at Yorba Linda, where President Richard Nixon was born. "We were the first technology business in this town which is known as the 'bed-room' community. The day we opened in 1990, the mayor called to congratulate us for bringing the IT business to his town. We have another office in San Francisco and one in India," he says.

"Future Computing Solutions Inc (FCS) provides solutions for real business problems in today's competitive landscape. It leverages a diverse portfolio of resources to service the customer's needs – whether it is a large corporate customer, a small business or consumer. The organisation has stayed competitive because of its unique business model by investing in resources in the emerging trends, by recognising and understanding the customer's needs, and by having multiple channels of reaching out to various types of customers beyond simply providing IT products," Bicky Singh explains.

According to him, his unique business model helped FCS weather the dotcom bust in the mid-to-late 1990s. "The key to our survival has been to invest in training, top-notch human resources and emerging technology. Our services are backed up with over 180 employees in three locations: corporate office in Yorba Linda, our sales and service location at Alameda and offshore location in India," he says.



Bicky Singh with the world's oldest marathon man, Fauja Singh, of Britain.

On his rolls are many MBAs and Ph.Ds, and they come from Central and South America, Vietnam, China, Taiwan, India, Europe and the USA. "Because of our inner diversity, we are in the unique position to understand the needs of the customers – large and small. FCS has made tremendous investment in technology, such as state-of-the-art lab for solutions demonstration in the area of enterprise storage, communication and VOIP, data warehousing/business intelligence and security. Investment in human and technological resources has allowed us to 'stay ahead of the curve' and be competitive in the global market-place."

His Indian operations, started near New Delhi in 1999, have grown from providing development services to business process out-sourcing. "Our development expertise includes: business to consumer (B2C), business-to-business (B2B), portals, intranets, application development and data warehousing/business intelligence services. With the investment in an off-shore facility, we are able to leverage the expertise of FCS India in a 23x7 fashion," he says.

Bicky Singh added another feather to his colourful turban in December 2003 when FCS launched an online business called *SecureMart.com* to sell electronics, home entertainment products, IT products, and kitchen and home appliances.

The artistic side to this 'techie' is obvious even at his workplace. In the lobby of his head office hangs a beautiful piece of artwork, titled *Circular Metal*, created by him. "This just about sums up my business philosophy," he beams.

[Extracted from CALIFORNIA DREAMS  
by Gurmukh Singh]



# Gurdwara Sahib of San Jose

A slice of San Jose, heart of the Silicon Valley in California, was transformed into an Indian oasis on 29 August 2004 when America's newest – and largest – Gurdwara was officially opened, drawing thousands to its onion-domed rooftops and cascading waterfall.

The daylong event, which closed traffic for two hours on Quimby Road as Sikhs and their neighbours marched joyously to the new \$ 10 million gurdwara on Murillo Avenue, took many visitors back to their native homeland. And, as they said, the grand structure perched high in the hills further welds the South Bay's Sikh community into the fabric of Silicon Valley. "I'm very emotional," said Amrit Singh Sachdev, a computer engineer. "This is bringing back memories for me, when the whole street is in joyous mood, just like it is in India."

The ceremony, which drew about 7,000 guests, signified a happy chapter in a rocky journey that began in the early 1990s.

Plans for the 40-acre property had sparked some controversy amongst the locals when Sikhs first unveiled their goal to move from the old temple on Quimby Road. A vocal minority of neighbours feared there would be traffic and noise headaches and criticised magnitude of the project, which was scaled back to meet some of the concerns. Public hearings in San Jose lasted late into the night and at times erupted into name-calling. Protesters carried signs reading "No Sikh Jose".

But none of that past acrimony was apparent on Sunday. For the most part, the non-Sikhs who came to see what all the pomp and circumstance was about, had smiles on their faces. Neighbours came out of their homes to watch a two-hour interfaith parade where barefoot men swept the streets before the procession and the Evergreen Valley High School marching band played *Louie, Louie*.

"We think it's great," said Karen Skulley of San Jose, whose 16-year-old son played saxophone in the parade. "All the controversy? That was so long ago. No one even talks about it any more!"

Pattie Cortese said she still hears a smattering of complaints from people in the neighbourhood, but she doesn't share their concerns. "This place is so beautiful," she said, along with her husband, San Jose City Councilman Dave Cortese, among the throngs of people on the temple site. "One of the things I love about living here in the Evergreen district is the rich cultural diversity. If we want peace here, we need to be tolerant of each other."

Tolerance is the heart of Sikhism, which was founded over 500 years ago by Guru Nanak Dev, who taught egalitarianism and monotheism. Today, there are about 25 million Sikhs worldwide, 500,000 in the United States and about 50,000 in Northern California, according to Sikh Mediawatch and Resource Task Force, headquartered in New York. The Bay Area's Sikh population is about 10,000.



View of San Jose's Evergreen hills from the San Jose Gurdwara.

The parade and party at the new gurdwara was smoothly run, with more than 200 volunteers helping direct parking, handing out free ice cream bars and water and cleaning up garbage.

The Sikhs worked long hours with San Jose police to hash out a parade route that wouldn't disrupt the neighbourhood for too long. An hour after the parade ended, traffic and noise were back to their usual Sunday quiet. Residents in the flatlands would have seen no signs that there were thousands of people up in the hills eating, praying and admiring the new temple.

At the Gurdwara however, the excitement was palpable. Kids with blue and saffron-coloured balloons scampered about. An aircraft flew overhead towing a banner that wished the new gurdwara well. Long lines snaked around the property as

visitors lined for *langar* of *saag* (spinach fritters) and sweet, buttery chick pea cubes.

Annual donations to the San Jose gurdwara total about \$1 million, funds which are crucial to finishing the next stage of construction. In the next four or five years, the community hopes to raise another \$ 10 million to build an additional 74,000 square feet for a permanent prayer hall, a Sunday school and museum. Today, the gurdwara stands at 20,000 square feet and includes three buildings.

In one sense, building a gurdwara and holding such an event is normal for the world's Sikhs, said Shamsher Singh, a religious leader at the temple. In the United States alone, there are 250 gurdwaras. "Wherever Sikhs live, the first thing they do is make a temple, that's where we pray and gather together socially," he said.

But for the Sikhs who live in the South Bay, knowing they have such a grand house of worship to call their own is a major milestone. "This is a little parade," said Bhupinder Kaur Saini, 19, of San Jose. "But it's a big thing that we're doing."

Lisa Fernandez



The Gurdwara's inspiring visage.



Sewadar and Manager at San Jose Gurdwara.



## Reading the holy scriptures at San Jose

The new Gurdwara in San Jose's Evergreen foot hills, which opened in August 2004, proves the powerful influence of memory and tradition shaping local architecture. It is set foursquare on a rise with a spectacular view of the valley, one of several prominent monuments (including Evergreen Valley high school, a retail area designed as an old-fashioned town centre around its plaza, and a planned library) gracing the Evergreen district.

A tall promenade rings the structure; colonnades link it with two auxiliary buildings, the columns fluted with lotus capitals. The decorative scallops of the arches were originally created to catch the light and shadows of the hot climates in India, and work just effectively in California's warm, sunny climate.

This is Phase 1 and a larger, 70,000-square-foot addition would follow. The gurdwara serves as a gathering place for the South Bay's large Sikh community.

A century ago Japanese and Indian architecture inspired the enormously popular craftsman bungalow; the craftsman style is Japanese-inspired, and bungalow is an Indian word. So we might



'Ek Omkar' on the Gurdwara's dome.

see a glimpse of Silicon Valley architecture of the future in this new-old architecture – if today's architects let themselves create a new fusion architecture. That doesn't mean that the temple's golden onion domes and scalloped arches will be the fashion of the future, but certainly means that Santa Clara County's extraordinary ethnic diversity is introducing new styles and types of buildings that should enrich us all.

The gurdwara design by architect Malkiat Singh Sidhu does not imitate any particular historic temple but echoes many of the Mughal style temples in the Punjab region of India, roots of the 500-year-old Sikh faith. Their domes and ornamental arches are a dignified classic style that matches the High Renaissance style of St. Joseph's cathedral downtown.

The Gurdwara's main building topped by the large gold dome is the reception hall and identifies the building from afar; inside it is painted with a blue sky and clouds, and 'Ek Omkar' (God in One.) Like the Golden Temple of Amritsar, this building has doors on all four sides, symbolising that all are welcome from all directions. On the second floor is a large hall, used for reading the scriptures, as well as a small museum on Sikh history and traditions.

As at the Golden Temple at Amritsar, water plays a major part in the design, the building placed in a large artificial lake that sets off the glided building and provides a long causeway approach for visitors. In the Evergreen neighbourhood the pools with fountains flank the main



building, and a waterfall plunges down the steep hill at the main entry.

But of course this is California, and the stone buildings of India are translated into stucco. They are ornamented with the disabled-accessible water fountains, glowing green “exit” sign, fire safety doors and embossed-acoustic-tile dropped ceilings of contemporary California buildings. The fruitful process that blends ancient architecture with modern times is a two-way street: the ethnic architecture of immigrants influences California and California influences the ancient ways of architecture. This is how architecture progresses.

The Gurdwara’s elegant, shapely dome rises in a light and airy gesture to the sky, fluted in the traditional manner, giving it a plastic energy quite different than the static European domes of St. Joseph’s cathedral, sitting weightily on its base. Smaller domes, more akin to fabric canopies, perch on the temple’s corners; they are made of glass fibre reinforced concrete.

Clerestory windows at the dome’s base bring light down into both levels of the building. In the reception area, rooms for storing shoes are provided, as shoes are removed and heads covered before congregants attend services. Marble floors inside and granite pavement outside reflect rich patterns of the Punjabi temples, adding rich tones of green, rose, mustard and alabaster,

Sikh religious services are relatively simple. Readings from the holy scriptures, the Guru Granth Sahib, constitute most of the service, along with hymns. Though the words are sacred, the space is not, in the way that a Catholic church’s altar is dedicated as sacred space for the priests and the ritual. The Sikh temple includes several large halls that can be used interchangeably for several purposes, including scripture readings, weddings, anniversary celebrations and dining. There are no seats or pews; everyone sits on the floor, underscoring the equality of all. Men and women attend the same services, though they could well sit on opposite sides of the room. The person reading the scriptures sits on a platform adorned with flowers and offerings.

From the reception hall, doors lead out to the two one-storey halls on either side. Finished much like the ballroom of a modern hotel, with a folding wall down the centre to divide the space for convenience, the rooms are filled with light from windows on all walls.

In a religion and culture like Sikhism, tradition is a living presence in the lives of its adherents. From its iconic dome to its pewless, flexible gathering rooms, the new gurdwara is shaped to reflect the needs and beliefs of the people using it. Growing out of an ancient culture, it shows us another way to look at architecture. Here’s a lesson for us: the past has a place in the present. Symbolism, meaning, history and memory should be every architect’s inspiration.

*Alan Hess*



# Cobwebs of the mind

I imagined that the pad being used was dry, not moist, and that the sevadar was probably dabbing away nonexistent dust. Now I learn that the pad is perfumed and may dispel insects that are common in the heat and dust of India.

In this early morning ceremony, *Guru Granth* is brought back to its place on the *palki* after a short night of rest, and the vestments gradually unwrapped ceremoniously one by one. *Guru Granth* is now randomly opened again after a gap of only four hours. For those few hours, *Guru Granth* was in a secure, clean, dust-free location, and now the sheet of linen is being wiped with a pad. How dabbing a sheet of linen both on its inside and outside with a piece of cloth is going to clean anything is beyond me, unless an insect repellent is being used.

Of course, I know the reverence that Sikhs have for *Guru Granth*; we regard it as the metaphorical embodiment of the Gurus. The hymn cited in support of this goes, "*Guru Granth ji manyon, Pargat guraan ki deh.*" It asks Sikhs to believe in *Guru Granth*, which is the manifest body of the Gurus. Still, I think we miss the meaning because we don't get the measured nuances of poetry. It seems that in our simplistically devotional and literal rendering of the language, we elide over the key concept here, which is

I first saw the rites some days ago. It baffled me then and continues to do so now. Not so long ago, an Indian television channel started daily airing of the early morning ceremony as *Guru Granth* is escorted from the *Akal Takht* in Amritsar. It is then ensconced on the palanquin (*palki*) at its designated site, where it will remain for the day. This is followed by the rendition of *Aasa-di-Vaar*. This is a daily ritual, and the solemnity of the occasion has undeniable magic to it.

*Guru Granth* comes wrapped in several layers of silk vestments as is escorted to and from the *Akal Takht*, but the final, innermost layer, akin to an undergarment, it seems, is always white linen. But that is not what prompts my reaction today.

I notice that as *Guru Granth* is placed on its *palki*, this last layer of white linen is opened and folded away in an exquisite ceremony. As each fold is pulled away, a sevadar takes a large pad of clean white cloth and carefully dabs and wipes both the inside and outside of the wrap. This is all done reverentially and makes a great photo-op, but it leaves me wondering.



'metaphorical,' and start thinking of *Guru Granth* as the 'physical' embodiment of the Gurus. I wonder if this ritual of cleaning the linen covering stems from such limited thinking. I wonder if this dabbing of the linen is akin to a ritual bath.

I wonder too if similar reasoning leads us to turn on the lights, a fan or the air conditioner in a room where *Guru Granth* is placed on a bed for the night, even if there is no human being attending it. It is as if the Guru had retired for the night. In fact, I have heard a preacher scold the congregation for not turning on the lights and air conditioning in the room where *Guru Granth* is left. His rationale was clear: Don't we need air conditioning during summer and lights at dusk? Why should the Guru have less? When we select heavier vestments in winter and lighter coverings for the summer, are we again translating and transferring our very human needs to *Guru Granth*? Although not at the Golden Temple but in other *gurdwaras* around the world, I also see that, particularly on the holy days, the faithful often donate a set of vestments for *Guru Granth*. Some days, many such sets arrive. I find it comical to see the granthi on duty accepting these sets and immediately arranging each on and around *Guru Granth*, one on top of the other, until it has many coverings. It reminds me of child putting a shirt on over a shirt, over another shirt and so on. That would be absurd.

On a more serious but related note, we see that in many *gurdwaras*, as recommended by some old breviaries with a popular following, the *parshaad*, as well as a plate full of the food, including a glass of water to be distributed later at the community meal (*langar*), are brought in at the time of the *ardaas*, the congregational prayer. Then, at the prayer, a plea is made to the Guru to partake of both.

Another practice often baffles me. I notice that thousands crane their necks, shove and push to get a glimpse of *Guru Granth* as it is opened for the day. The Indic languages, including Punjabi, refer to this as *darshan*. Obtaining such *darshan* of royalty and godmen, and perhaps of godwomen also, continues to be a highly prized human activity all over the world. But I would think that the meaning of the word does not refer just to catching a fleeting glimpse but to actually experiencing the person. So the *darshan* of the Guru in *Guru Granth* mandates an interaction.

I would argue that *Guru Granth* remains a book, even if highly valued, revered and treasured, just like many other books in a home, until it is opened, read

and pondered. Then a dialogue with the Guru ensues—and that is true *darshan*.

Clearly, many of these practices stem from an anthropomorphic view of *Guru Granth* and from our misplaced devotion.

I think it is easy to discern why *Guru Granth* traditionally has been wrapped so well, completely and elaborately. Keep in mind that the first copies of *Guru Granth* were handwritten. To scribe such a large volume – 1,430 pages – is not easy. Each new handwritten copy also carried a substantial risk of error in transcribing. The handwritten copy of *Guru Granth* was a rare manuscript written on paper with a limited life and in ink that may have been of dubious quality. This meant that very few authentic copies were available; each had to be treasured and tended reverentially. Preserving such a work of art was not always easy, but it was necessary; hence the multiple coverings carefully and precisely arranged. In the dust and heat of India, such care was particularly necessary.

But times have changed and printed versions of *Guru Granth* are universally available. The Bible is now printed in the millions and freely distributed at street corners; I wonder if this lessens its importance any. The primary purpose of a book is to be read, unless it is of historical significance and is preserved under glass. Even then the essential purpose of reading is served by making copies widely available.

I also understand that the *palki* on which *Guru Granth* is ensconced is washed in milk. I understand that milk is precious and, therefore, preferred over water for the *palki* that we treasure so much. I also see that in the Indian culture, milk is used to bathe babies and beautiful women; it is good for the skin and, I suppose, a better moisturiser than any available a century ago. Skin-moisturising creams are now preferred; for cleaning the wooden or metallic surface of a *palki*, better and more efficient cleansers are available. The milk would serve a better purpose if it were fed to babies.

I don't know whether to blame our misplaced love and reverence for some of our pointless practices, or to pass the buck to the predominant Hindu practices of India in which delectable foods, clothes and ritual baths are routinely offered to stone idols and deities.

I do not know what cobwebs these practices highlight – those of the *palki* and place, or those of the mind?

Dr. I.J. Singh

# Bhai Santa Singh : A unique exponent of the Guru's Hymn

Recollecting my childhood, it was in the winter of 1948 that I first heard the signature tune of All India Radio even as a sweet voice announced the time of 5:00 am and the start of a special one hour morning service on the airwaves of All India Radio Amritsar in honour of the birth anniversary of Guru Nanak. The announcer said that "we are taking you to the Golden Temple Amritsar for direct transmission of the recitation of Aasa Di Vaar." In a split second the beat of tabla, the sound of harmonium and voices of a group of musicians were heard. It seemed that the musicians were emotionally calling upon Guru Nanak to once again bless this earth. Special recitation of hymns of the 'Guru' sounded genuinely emotional and rather impressive. At that young age I did not understand as to what was being sung, nevertheless, I felt embraced by the melody, tone and texture of the music. I had no knowledge as to who was singing, nor did anybody especially announce it.

Several years later, I met with Sardar Jodh Singh, the retired Assistant Station Director of All India Radio Jullundur. He happened to be announcer of the programme in the sanctum sanctorum of the Golden Temple on that auspicious day. He revealed that the group of musicians performing Shabad Kirtan of Aasa Di Vaar at the Golden Temple during the first ever live transmission was led by Bhai Santa Singh, then senior most musician of the Golden Temple. I knew all along that it was somebody special, somebody highly accomplished. A number of Shabads recorded on 78 rpm gramophone records in the voices of Bhai Santa Singh Ragi and party were soon available in the market and different stations of All India Radio including Delhi, Jullundur Jammu and Lucknow used to broadcast these. Bhai Santa Singh had the God-given unique capability to sing in very high notes, which most other musicians could not replicate.

His exact date of birth is not known, but he was born in the walled city of Amritsar in 1904. During those days, few Sikhs used to sing in gurdwaras and those who did, had to hone their skills at classical music under the strict guidance of Muslim or Pandit professional classical teachers. Bhai Santa Singh was no exception; he had enrolled at very young age to learn Sikh classical music in the music department of the famous 'Yateem Khana' in Amritsar. The

head teacher was a renowned trainer in classical music, Bhai Sain Ditta. Several of Sain Ditta's students served as 'Huzoori Ragis' at the Golden Temple. Other famous students of Sain Ditta included Bhai Taba, Bhai Naseera, Bhai Darshan Singh Komal and Sain Ditta's own son Bhai Desa. But Bhai Santa Singh was

exceptional amongst them all. Soon after completing his education at the 'Yateem Khana', Bhai Santa Singh was employed as a 'Huzoori Ragi' at the Golden Temple during the early twenties. His group included another famous personality Bhai Surjan Singh. Both were bestowed with clear and melodious voices and could sing in unison. The democratically elected governing body for the Sikh shrines the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC), in replacing the old institution of 'Mahanthood' took control of all the historic Sikh shrines in the Punjab and North West Frontier Province in 1925, and a very high standard of 'Gurmat Sangeet' (traditional Sikh religious music) was maintained at most Gurdwaras during the first three decades of inception of the SGPC.

During those days the Golden Temple at Amritsar was renowned for employing highly accomplished musicians in performing *Chawnkis* of Shabad Kirtan. Recommendations by the influential and powerful were never considered in the recruitment of staff. Other great musicians in service at the Golden Temple included the legendary Bhai Lal, Bhai Chand, Bhai Chanan, Bhai Hira Singh and others. However, Bhai Santa Singh soon carved a niche for himself. He was very hard-working. As a first step he used to convey meaning of the Shabad without any need of explaining it through a speech or discourse. At times he used to slow down the beat so much that the meaning of each word of the 'Guru' was understood clearly, even by a layman. While reciting the *Bir Rus Bani* (martial music) of the tenth master Guru Gobind Singh, he vividly



conveyed the aspect of war by increasing pace of the musical composition.

On special occasions, the Darbar Sahib at Amritsar and Gurdwara Janam Asthan at Nankana Sahib, two most sacred Gurdwaras, used to exchange their leading musicians and Bhai Santa Singh regularly visited Nankana Sahib.

All India Radio Lahore came into being in 1936, and full fledged production facilities were added there in 1937, which was the year when Bhai Santa Singh, was also approved as an occasional radio artist. During that time the line up of classical vocal radio artists of All India Lahore included Dalip Chander Vedi, Bade Ghulam Ali Khan, Master Rattan of Phagwara, Master Madan, Dina Qawwal of Jullundur, Mubarik Ali Fateh of Jullundur and Harish Chander Bali. The leading Sikh religious musicians included Bhai Santa Singh of the Golden Temple and Bhai Samund Singh of Gurdwara Janam Asthan, Nankana Sahib. Malika Pukhraj, Bhai Chhaila of Patiala, Mohammad Rafi, Noorjehan, Zeenat Begum, Shamshad Begum, Dilshad Begum, Mukhtar Begum, Parkash Kaur and Surinder Kaur were then considered as fairly junior Punjabi and 'Ghazal' singers.

The occasional singing at All India Radio Lahore made Bhai Santa Singh very famous. The Gramophone Recording Company opened a modern recording studio in Lahore. Master Ghulam Haider was hired as its music director and developed special liking for the voice of Bhai Santa Singh and persuaded him to record some Shabads. The tunes were either traditional Sikh religious *Reets* handed down from generation to generation or Bhai Santa Singh's own highly melodious creations. The orchestra with special preludes and interludes was of course Ghulam Haider's. Eight shabads were recorded on four discs of three minutes each and became very popular. These recordings were made in 1941-42, but their 45 rpm extended play discs were available till the 1970s. Another Sikh musician whose recordings of Sikh religious music are amongst the earliest available on records include Bhai Budh Singh Taan, whose rendering of *Aasa Di Vaar* was available on a set of 12 discs in 78 rpm format.

*Aasa Di Vaar* by the duet of Bhai Sudh Singh Pardhan Singh was also recorded during the forties. Some records of *Shabad Gayan* in the voices of Bhai Gurmukh Singh Sarmukh Singh Fakkar of Nankana

Sahib were also once available. In addition *Shabad Gayan* in the voice of child prodigy Master Madan was also recorded during the nineteen forties. This recording, after disappearing from the market for several decades, is once again available. Some Shabads sung by Bhai Budh Singh Taan and Surinder Kaur were also available during the forties. Although Bhai Samund Singh sang regularly for the radio, he did not record his *Shabad Gayan* until the nineteen sixties, when during the QuinCentennial celebrations of the birth of Guru Nanak, a set of five long playing records was issued.

After the creation of Pakistan, Bhai Samund Singh joined Bhai Santa Singh in service of the Golden Temple. They had very different styles of performing 'Shabad Kirtan'. Bhai Samund Singh used to perform a modified version of *Khayal Gayaki*, leave the Alaap, Jor Alaap and the Vilambhat Lai as well as the climax Shrut Lai and sing the entire 'Shabad' in Madh Lai. On the other hand Bhai Santa Singh either sang in the traditional *Reets* handed down from generation to generation or he created his own *Reets* by improvising new tunes from the source of Ragas and Raginis. Bhai Santa Singh would practice for hours at a stretch to the accompaniment of a Taan Pura.

Bhai Santa Singh believed in very simple living. He used to ride a bicycle on his way to perform 'Shabad Kirtan'. An admirer once presented a car to him, which he retained for a few days before returning it back to him. The reason given for spurning the offer was that he used to recite *paath* while riding a cycle and he used to complete the *paath* while on the bike, but when he was being driven in the car the same distance was travelled in just 5 minutes and he could not complete the *paath*. Such was the simplicity in Bhai Santa Singh. Once the famous Bhai Chand was to perform last of all in a special 'Kirtan Diwan' in pre-partition Lahore and Bhai Santa Singh was the penultimate singer. But Bhai Chand got so impressed with the 'Shabad Gayan' by Bhai Santa Singh, that he requested Bhai Santa Singh to finish the 'Diwan' by singing 'Raga Darbari Kanra'. This was narrated to me by Bhai Gurdip Singh, later head priest of New York's Richmond Hill Gurdwara.

Some time in 1949, Bhai Santa Singh left services of the SGPC and temporarily moved to New Delhi. Soon he tried his hand at becoming a building contractor in Assam, but contractorship did not suit his temperament and he took employment at Gurdwara Sis Ganj Sahib in Old Delhi. Delhi was then

becoming a city of refugees from West Pakistan and many of his most ardent admirers had moved from Lahore, Gujranwala, Lyallpur, Montgomery, Sialkot and Shaikhupura to Delhi. For them it was nostalgic to again listen to the 'Shabad Gayan' by Bhai Santa Singh. On hearing about Bhai Santa Singh's joining the service of Gurdwara Sis Ganj Sahib, crowds at that historic gurdwara greatly swelled each morning.

The refugee Sangat of Delhi got so hooked listening to Bhai Santa Singh's 'Shabad Kirtan' at Gurdwara Sis Ganj at Chandni Chowk that they insisted that the early morning *Chawnki* of *Aasa Di Vaar* must always be performed by the group of Bhai Santa Singh. The only other groups 'allowed' to perform *Aasa Di Vaar* in the absence of Bhai Santa Singh was Bhai Avtar Singh Gurcharan Singh and Swaran Singh, formerly of Sultanpur Lodhi in Kapurthala District.

While at Delhi, Bhai Santa Singh became the staff artist of All India Radio Delhi and his live performance of 'Shabad Kirtan' became a regular feature of its Punjabi programme. Some years after 1947, one of the most important members of his group Bhai Surjan Singh parted company and formed his own group, which naturally affected him, but he trained his brother Bhai Shamsher Singh to sing alongside him. In the meanwhile Bhai Surjan Singh's newly created group also became very popular. To this day the best selling records of *Aasa Di Vaar* are those by Bhai Surjan Singh.

On the passing of Prime Minister Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru in 1964, Bhai Santa Singh was the only Sikh religious musician especially invited to perform 'Shabad Kirtan' during the period of mourning at All India Radio. Some of these recordings are still preserved in archives of the Delhi Station of All India Radio. At one time or the other, every great maestro, be a vocalist or an instrumentalist has had the honour of singing at one or the other stations of All India Radio. Some of those artists were recorded but many others were not. Even of those whose performances were recorded, many were lost owing to callousness of the authorities. If all the recordings of Bhai Santa Singh and Bhai Samund Singh would have been preserved, we would have had at least 300 hours of recordings of each. It is tragic that their priceless offering has been lost.

Yogi Harbhajan Singh was a great admirer of Bhai Santa Singh. In order to train his followers, the

American Sikhs, in the art of performing 'Shabad Gayan' he wanted to bring one of the students of Bhai Santa Singh's school of music to America. Bibi Amarjit Kaur, who had honed her skills under the guidance of Bhai Santa Singh went from India to America for the purpose. She now works in the World Bank and lives in Virginia, one of the suburbs of Washington DC. By listening to her you can get a glimpse of her great mentor. 'The unmistakable manner in which she modulates her voice, reveals that she is true to the teachings of her great mentor.

In 1965, Bhai Santa Singh's former companion Bhai Surjan Singh left for his heavenly abode. Although they had parted company years ago, yet Bhai Santa Singh felt very dejected but life must go on and Bhai Santa Singh did not miss any of his Kirtan schedules.

Bhai Santa Singh was in great demand for his unique style of 'Shabad Kirtan' all over India, but he seldom left Delhi. Once in 1966, on the persistent request of the Sangat of Bombay he was allowed to go to Bombay for a couple of weeks. On hearing this, the knowledgeable Sadh Sangat of Bombay was electrified to have the once-in-a-life-time experience of listening to Bhai Santa Singh live. They requested for more of his time, but the management of Gurdwara Sis Ganj in Delhi refused to extend his stay, because the Sangat in Delhi too wanted to listen to his 'Shabad Kirtan'. On the day of his departure for Delhi big crowds gave him a tearful send off in Bombay. On his way back to Delhi, while still in the train, he suffered a massive heart attack and before any medical care could be administered, he passed away. Bhai Santa Singh's funeral saw the community go into deep mourning.

After Bhai Santa Singh's passing, his brother Bhai Shamsher Singh took over his *raagi jatha*. Bhai Shamsher Singh could sing all the tunes of Bhai Santa Singh, but lacked the range and modulation. After the passing of Bhai Shamsher Singh about two decades ago, Bhai Santa Singh's nephews Bhai Harjit Singh and Bhai Gurdip Singh are keeping his tradition alive. They perhaps cannot come up to the dexterity of Bhai Santa Singh, but have kept all his *Reets* alive, being leading musicians of the Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee and held in high esteem.

*Harjap Singh Aujla*  
(Courtesy Amrit Keertan)

*"I applaud Harpreet Kaur and Sach Productions for producing 'The Widow Colony.' I found it to be a haunting experience that truly educated me."*  
 Mayor Sidney Katz

## Gaithersburg City Honours Sikh Woman Filmmaker

On 28 October 2007 the city of Gaithersburg hosted a screening of the award-winning film, *The Widow Colony*, directed by Harpreet Kaur. The event was held at Gaithersburg High School, where Kaur is an alumnus. Gaithersburg's Multicultural Affairs Committee hosted the event to create an understanding and appreciation of the city's many cultures through education and outreach.



Mayor Sidney Katz honouring Director Harpreet Kaur.



Producer Manmeet Singh, Mayor Sidney Katz, Director Harpreet Kaur.

Mayor Sidney Katz honoured Kaur for her courage, dedication and contribution to human rights and for her pursuit to expose the suffering of the November 1984 Sikh widows and their battle for survival and justice in India.

Along with City, Montgomery County Public Schools Board of Education also commended Kaur's work. On behalf of the MCPS Board of Education, Nivea Berrios expressed the importance of the film. "As co-Chair of the City of Gaithersburg Multicultural Affairs Committee, I am very proud to see the fine production directed by one of Montgomery County Public Schools graduates.

It is very important for our committee to promote understanding, respect and appreciation of other cultures through community education. We all need to be aware and educated on the suffering and struggle for survival of these widows and their beloved children. It was an honour for me to be part of the presentation."

*"The Widow Colony – India's Unsettled Settlement"*, borrows its name from a settlement in Tilak Vihar on the west-side of New Delhi that is commonly known as the Widow Colony or *Vidhva Colony*. Along with testimonies of the widows and images of the death and destruction that followed assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, the film conveys the intensity of the tragedy that occurred 23 years ago. It takes an in-depth look into the lives of the women whose husbands were killed in the anti-Sikh pogrom in November 1984. Kaur shared her heart-filled experience of making the film and the universality of human suffering. "Be it the widow of the 1984 massacre or a widow of the Rwandan genocide, for me it's one people. I've vowed to become a voice for the voiceless and forgotten. I speak through my camera lens and I hope to reach out to the masses."

Kaur has been successful in spreading the stories of the widows. *The Widow Colony* has had the opportunity of touring several film festivals. It was the first Sikh film to be shown at the Smithsonian in Washington D.C. and it also screened at the American Film Institute (AFI) in Silver Spring. It was at the Calgary Premiere in Canada that drew nearly 900 viewers. At the Female Eye Film Festival it won the Best Documentary award and at the International South Asian Film Festival it was given the highest honour of Favourite Film Over-all, along with the Best Documentary award.



Widow of the November 1984 anti-Sikh pogrom.

## Extract from “When a Tree Shook Delhi” by Manoj Mitta and HS Phoolka

Whichever way you look at India, whether as the world’s largest democracy, or as one of the fastest growing economies in the world, it is hard to imagine that any genocide could have taken place a few years ago right in its capital.

A UN convention, signed by India, defined genocide in 1948 as mass violence committed with ‘intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such’. In an uncanny transposition of the figures of that year, Delhi had its tryst with genocide in 1984.

But there was little consciousness of genocide in the public discourse of that period, despite Rajiv Gandhi’s infamous attempt to shrug off state responsibility by dismissing the massacre of 3,000 Sikhs in three days as the tremors caused by “the fall of a mighty tree.”

The first time Indian parliament and courts ever saw any serious debate on the question of genocide was in the context of the 2002 carnage in Gujarat, in which (officially) 790 Muslims and 254 Hindus were killed, and 223 persons went missing over three months.

The Hindu right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which had presided over the 2002 carnage, sought to counter charges of genocide by citing one telling contrast with the 1984 carnage: almost all the casualties in Delhi were of a minority community, while scores of Hindus were killed in Gujarat in police firing. The Congress camp took refuge in an equally striking contrast: the Delhi massacre was controlled in three days, while the Gujarat carnage dragged on for three months.....

Given the hostility displayed towards Sikhs by the Rajiv Gandhi government in so many blatant ways in aftermath of the carnage, Varshney, (a US-based political scientist) it would seem, could not possibly have had that crucial and prolonged phase of the Congress rule in mind when he noticed signs of repentance in the party. But, strangely enough, he referred to actions of that very phase while trying to substantiate his theory that the Congress Party had undergone a change of heart.

The source he quoted was a newspaper article titled ‘Pot is blacker than the kettle’, written by senior journalist Shekhar Gupta, during the Gujarat violence, offering a comparison that was misleading, however well-intentioned. While making a case for Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee to take action against Modi, Gupta cited, of all things, what he saw as ‘damage control’ started immediately by Rajiv Gandhi, in 1984: ‘The Congressmen whose names surfaced, or were even popularly mentioned in connection with the killings, all paid the price. Political careers of HKL Bhagat, Jagdish Tytler, and Sajjan Kumar, never recovered from the taint of 1984 although nobody was ever convicted.’ In reality, the political careers of Bhagat and Tytler, far from suffering on account of ‘the taint of 1984’, blossomed as if they had been rewarded for engineering the violence. Having won the 1984 election under the shadow of the carnage, Rajiv Gandhi immediately promoted Bhagat to the rank of cabinet minister, and inducted Tytler into the government for the first as minister of state. Both remained in the Rajiv Gandhi government till the end of its tenure in 1989.

If such facts failed to register in the minds of opinion makers such as Gupta and Varshney, it is indicative of the extent of misinformation on the 1984 carnage and its aftermath. In a larger perspective, this shows that for all the material progress made by India, its legal culture is still far from developed. If the struggle for justice could not secure the conviction of a single political leader or police officer; if so many institutions collapsed during and after the 1984 carnage; if Delhi set a precedent for mass killings in Gujarat, the civil society cannot escape blame for lack of ‘due diligence’, and for neglecting the duty of ‘eternal vigilance’.

Despite all the setbacks, the tale of this two-decade struggle is, thankfully, not entirely of despair. It has had its moments of consolation: when prosecution for murder was brought against Bhagat and Sajjan Kumar; when Bhagat was detained for a while during his trial; when Tytler was forced to resign as a minister after being indicated by a judicial inquiry; when Prime Minister Manmohan Singh apologised in parliament for the event even if that came twenty years too late.

The losses have been substantial; the gains, symbolic. The challenge now is to make those gains more systemic and enduring.

## “Extreme Steps ?”

Lashing out at the judiciary in “delaying justice” for victims of the 1984 anti-Sikh riots in Delhi, the All India Sikh Conference vowed on 31 October 2007 to take “extreme steps” if justice was not delivered.

The protesters accused the government of “deliberately botching the issue” to shield “its men” from being punished.

“It is a shame for India that even after 23 years the guilty are free and we have to carry out demonstrations to seek justice,” AISC president Gurcharan Singh Babbar said. “Should we go to Pakistan or the United States for justice? We have filed several petitions but the government has not acted. We ask the government to take suo motu action in the matter otherwise our silence can spiral out of control,” he warned.

# Anand Sahib

## The Psalm of Bliss

Twilight sets  
My mind drifts .....

The bani of  
*Anand Sahib*  
Fills my soul.

*Anand Sahib*  
A reflection of the  
inner bliss  
Blessed by  
'The Sat – The Truth.'

The Guru says:  
Hear me, my mother  
I have found  
'*The Sat Guru*  
The True Teacher'  
Within.

My mind resonates  
With this Truth  
All is serene  
All is divine.

My question:  
How does one  
Experience this Anand?

The answer:  
Think Truth  
Speak Truth  
Live Truth  
Enshrine Truth.

Duality disappears  
Truth become the  
anchor.  
Remember  
Always keep  
The Truth in mind.

When the mind is  
Immersed in Truth  
Grace is bestowed

One experiences  
*Anand* – bliss.  
Dedicate your life  
To Truth  
The only Giver.  
All else  
Is a passing show.

Mastering the  
Panch Dooth  
*Sukh*  
Arrives.

*Anhad*  
The Unstruck Melody  
Rings within.

Devotion must be pure  
There can be no barter  
For only Truth  
Bestows Grace.

Live in *Hukam*  
Live in Truth.  
*The Word* resonates  
In one  
Who lives in Truth.

Through cleverness of  
mind  
Truth cannot be obtained.  
*Maya and Mohines*  
are powerless  
To one  
Imbued with Truth.

O My beloved mind  
Remain in Truth  
For when the Call comes  
Let there be no regrets.

Truth is infinite  
The mind is limited  
There is no "I"  
There is only Truth.

Seekers seek  
*The Divine Nectar*  
The nectar of Truth  
Which is bestowed  
By living the Truth.

Seekers walk  
A distinct path  
A path of Equipoise  
Sharper than a sword  
Finer than a hair.

Truth makes one walk  
This path.  
Through the Guru's  
Door  
Truth is experienced.

The Word whispers  
A householder  
Evolves  
Into  
*A Gurmukh*.

Truth  
Radiates  
From  
*A Gurmukh*  
For all to see.

Meaningless rituals  
Clever arguments  
Contrived actions  
Pollute the soul.

Inwardly polluted  
Outwardly pure  
One loses this precious  
life  
In a gamble.

Be Pure  
Be Noble  
Inwardly  
Outwardly

For Truth  
To reside.

Be sincere  
Meditate  
Surrender  
Evolve.

Countless births  
Countless deaths  
Without Truth  
There is no *mukti*.

Bani is the Truth  
Forever the Truth  
Evolve spiritually  
Experience the Truth.

The Word is the jewel  
Studded with diamonds.  
Imbued with this jewel  
The mind becomes  
priceless.

From Oneness  
Comes pluralities.  
Those who realise this  
Truth  
Are the *Gurmukhs*.

Ancient texts  
Discuss evil and virtuous  
deeds.  
These are effects  
Not the cause.

Find the  
Core Essence  
Be awake  
Wedded to Truth.

Through my mother  
Truth gave me this life  
Truth is my source  
Truth my natural being.

Why dissociate  
From Truth  
The giver and  
The sustainer of life.

Connected to Truth  
I blossom  
I bloom  
Disconnected  
I wither away.

The fire in the womb  
Creates the physique  
The same fire  
Shapes the mind.

Born pure  
One gets attached  
To desires  
And forgets  
The Truth.

Priceless  
Is the Truth  
It cannot  
Be traded.

Priceless  
The beings  
In whose heart  
Resides the Truth.

Truth the treasure  
Mind the seeker  
*Simran* the path  
To this wealth.

O My tongue  
Worldly tastes  
Will leave you  
Unquenched.

Pure satisfaction  
Is  
Being Graced  
By the Truth.

Truth  
Is  
My Creator.

I am  
a  
Child of Truth.

My mother and father  
Are physical  
manifestations  
Of the Truth.

By the  
Grace of Truth  
Some understand  
This reality.

Those beings  
Living this world  
Are not  
Of this world.

Truth has arrived  
My mind is joyful  
My heart sings  
My body an altar.

Suffering  
Sadness  
Vanish.

The Unstruck Melody  
I hear within.

O My body  
Having come into this  
world  
What have you earned?

Engrossed in worldly  
affairs  
You abandoned  
The One  
That created you.

Blessed are those  
That enshrine  
The Truth  
In this consciousness.

The life  
That radiates  
The Truth  
Is blessed.

O My eyes  
It is Truth  
That placed  
The Light in you.

Rise  
Envision  
The Light  
In all.

Be unattached  
To form  
Search for  
The essence.

Truth Graces  
Blindness disappears  
Divine vision  
One receives.

O My ears  
You were created  
To hear  
The Truth.

Listen  
Absorb  
Experience  
Divinity.

Truth  
Created  
Cradled  
Gave  
The breath of life.

Revealing  
The nine doors  
Keeping  
The tenth hidden.

Spiritual wisdom  
Enables one  
To perceive  
The Tenth door.

Numerous forms  
Numerous names  
All manifestations  
Of the Truth.

Truth  
Manifests life  
Truth  
Sustains life  
Truth  
Concludes life.

This  
Truthful Melody  
Resides within  
The purified mind.

Experiencing  
The Melody within  
All desires  
Are fulfilled.

Truth (The One)  
Is realised.

Separation  
Sorrow  
Depart.

Imbued  
In Truth  
One  
Becomes pure.

Says Nanak:  
I bow to the feet  
Of the one  
Who hears  
The Divine Melody  
Within.

My head falls  
Tears flow  
*Shukar*  
*Shukar*  
*Shukar*

**Guru ang sung !**  
**Inni Kaur**  
2007



## READER'S RESPONSE

Sir,

Your attention is drawn to the article on page 59 of the *Nishaan* issue (I/2006) wherein there is a review of the publication 'Historical Dictionary of Sikhism' authored by WH McLeod. On going through the review one is somewhat confused but even more bemused ! One has the highest respect and regard for the objectivity and scholarship of Dr IJ Singh, one of the reviewers, but in this instance, he seems to have been more than kind to the author of the dictionary. Time and again, he has indicated his opposition to some basic statements and inferences made by Prof McLeod. It appears from the catalogue of controversies created by him, that Hugh McLeod has indeed spent his life time in research – perhaps with a avowed agenda of disseminating doubts about certain facets of the Sikh faith – either unintentionally, in pursuit of his emphasis on sceptical investigations vis-à-vis traditional interpretation; or intentionally in pursuit of some hidden agenda.

McLeod's pursuit in "sceptical investigations" has been vociferously questioned and debated by a host of well recognised Sikh scholars and, therefore, less said the better about his views and tainted dogma.

However, Dr IJ Singh, after having vigorously negated McLeod's fundamentals, continues to give him credit for misguided and half baked entries against a host of topics included in the dictionary.

Perhaps, the only worthwhile contribution is the third section containing a comprehensive bibliography of source materials. To his credit McLeod "even provides references to publications that have been sharply critical of his own writings" and disinformation based on misinformation.

Actually, this 'dictionary' hardly qualifies for distinction or ownership !

Yours etc.  
Anup Singh,  
Gurgaon

As extracted from the Journal of Sikh Studies, WH McLeod is an agnostic who started as Christian Padre from New Zealand, had powerful connections, first working with 'Goras' at the Baring Union Christian College, Batala, Punjab and secondly, with rabid Hindu lobby which not only had developed a powerful bias against the Sikhs and Sikhism, but also had the support of a powerful Government and its intelligence setup, including the external intelligence agency.

WH McLeod has written profusely on the Sikhs, but with malice. By the time he wrote on Guru Nanak for his PhD in 1960s, according to his own admission in his autobiography, he had become an agnostic. That showed that he had also lost faith in Christianity, Christ and the Bible. These had earlier played a powerful role in the framing of his mind. One may take that at face value. It is surprising that one who loses faith in his own religion or faith, should claim to understand, must less interpret, another faith like that of Guru Nanak. It was not surprising that whenever he sought to apply his mind to Sikh scriptures, his character as a doubting Thomas must have come to the fore, making him a sceptic and a cynic.

Sir,

I have read with interest the article on 'Distinction of the Rabab' by Bhai Baldeep Singh which appeared in *Nishaan's* issue IV/2006. That is a wonderful article, indeed. It is always a treat to read or listen to Bhai Baldeep Singh who has been doing a wonderful job for posterity.

Therein he writes that some of the finest exponents of those times such as Bhai Jwala Singh, Bhai Sunder Singh, Bhai Sher Singh, Mian Karim Bux, Ustad Harnam Singh of Jammu, Pt.Nathu Ram, Bhai Moti, Bhai Dal Singh, Bhai Chand and Bhai Baran Singh of Mehli, to name a few were never recorded.

But forgive me for pointing out a small discrepancy relating to Bhai Moti. The fact is that when some stalwarts of Indian classical music such as Ustad Kale Khan of Kasoor were recorded during 1904, nearly at the same time or a bit later, some famous Rababis such as Bhai Boora, Bhai Roorra, including Bhai Moti, were also recorded. Long before partition of the country in 1947, we had one of his records of *Todi* in our house which was destroyed by the ravages of time.

In the same article, the learned scholar mentions the name of Bhai Baran Singh as well. By that, perhaps he means Bhai Rattan Singh of Mehli – a printer's devil, I presume.

Once again, I congratulate Bhai Sahib for writing such a wonderful article.

Yours etc.  
Balbir Singh Kanwal  
Ilford, Essex (UK)

Sir,

*Nishaan* II/2007 : I absolutely love the cover ! Love the way the beard is swaying.

The photographs taken of the Sikh Day parade in New York are just stunning. *Nishaan's* photographer has a new career, going around the world clicking photographs!

Yours etc.  
IK Dhingra  
New York



Photograph sent by a *Nishaan* reader driving to Ferozepore, with the query whether the Journal has branched out into the educational field.